MATRIS TI KINAASINNO/WOMB OF BEING

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I was nervous. My hands were clammy and I could feel sweat accumulating on the bottom of my feet. It was the second week of graduate school and I was sitting in my Political Science class titled Indigenous Peoples and Western Imperialism. We were instructed to go on the computer and bring up a map to show where we came from and where our ancestors originated. It was an exercise in getting to know each other. One by one my classmates went up and told the class stories about their personal memories and connections to the land and also the significance of the land to the people they belonged to. Before I was to go up, a Filipino guy went up and showed a map of Ilocos Norte, Philippines where I was born and spent my early childhood. He began with an explanation of the genealogy of Ilocos and Ilokanos. I was shocked because he knew specifics about Ilokano people, culture, and history while I sat there dumbfounded for I knew none of those stories. It was as if he could see all the way into my soul better than I could. He knew more about me than I knew about myself. I felt like an outsider to my own people and culture. It was hard to listen as I became engulfed with different emotions. I could feel tears welling up in the inner corners of my eyes as memories of my childhood flashed across my mind: my grandma and I taking the tricycle as she accompanied me to school every morning, endless summers I spent in Pasaleng with my nieces and nephews, and picnics at Pasaleng Bay eating seafood straight from the ocean and vegetables from our yard. All of these are memories of times past. It is no longer my reality as I flash forward to the present where I sit in a classroom in one of the buildings at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The pain and longing I felt as my heart cried out
for the Ilocos that I can no longer go back to was in stark contrast to the pride emanating from my classmate as he told stories of our origins as a people. Why was it that he felt pride while I felt pain? Why did I not feel proud to be Ilokano? As I went up in front of the class, I felt ashamed because it seemed that I barely knew my own people and I barely knew myself. I was lost in the whirlwind that was my reality: United States occupied Hawai‘i. I was also angry not only at myself but also at everything around me. I began to question not only how my classmate knew this knowledge but also why it was that I knew so little. It led me to question my own existence and identity. I began to wonder about my own story and personal journey that disconnected me from my Ilokano identity and culture.

This is a story about an event that made me sit up and ask questions. I realized that I did not know about myself, where I came from, and who I have become. From my Ilocos to here, my experiences have been a form of knowledge that clouded more and more my ability to even tell my story.

*Matri* means womb and I use it in this thesis as a metaphor or symbol. The womb is where our conception as being begins. *Kinaasinno* is one’s identity. By identity, I do not mean something fixed and unchanging. Rather, I mean that we are always in the process of becoming. By using this concept of *matris ti kinaasinno* I invoke the fact that I am always a work in progress: the fact that I am a woman has not ended, the fact that I am an Ilokano woman has not ended, the fact that I am an immigrant Ilokano woman in Hawai‘i has not ended, and the fact that I am an immigrant Ilokano woman and an American citizen has not ended. The *matris* then becomes the womb of continuing conceptions and conceptualizations that are never final.
A. Background

I begin with my story to provide a voice: an immigrant Ilokano woman’s voice that carries with it the cries of the Ilokano community and other marginalized people of the world. These cries are cries against injustice and oppression. These cries not only unearth the repression and pain of the community but also challenges mainstream stories. I highlight the power of an individual voice to show that the self in becoming is political and that the individual cannot be separated from the social.

Dominant narratives of history and commonly distributed knowledge highlights the history of the victors, the conquerors, but rarely are conquered and marginalized people’s history and culture represented. How did this originate? How has this been reproduced? How did it become normalized? Moreover, what disrupted our reality? What changed our way of life and more specifically what disconnected us to our world, our ancestors, our ways of being? How did it change the way we did things and the way we saw the world and our relationship to it? At the same time, how did we survive and how did we challenge what was superimposed to us in order to hold on to our indigenous ways?

I attribute the disruption of the indigenous world to colonialism. The land that sustained us was once vast, open, and giving but was eventually claimed and owned. The land that was once abundant is depleted and utilized by the victors for their personal gain, thereby leaving conquered people poor, barely surviving, nothing to call our own, and devastated. This has left immeasurable damages and long lasting negative consequences physically, but most importantly we are left to carry the burden of colonial trauma and damage to the psyche. The violence of conquest is only at the surface of colonialism.
The investment in the silencing, repression, and normalizing of the oppression has had lasting consequences and continues to be felt today. We are a product of colonialism and its legacy. We live in that reality, which garners our consensus as it normalizes the colonial reality. As colonized peoples, we are no longer the same. We cannot go back to the way things used to be. Instead, we face a harsh reality of dealing with the injury and damage of colonialism.

For us Ilokano, our traditional Ilokano knowledge, culture, language, and identity (although I recognize and assert that there is no authentic, pure, or essential Ilokano-ness) face serious damages incurred from colonial policies of control. One of the ways this was done was through the establishment of colonial education based on the repression and subordination of traditional and indigenous knowledges along with the perpetuation of lies of saving the Filipinos reinforced the injury of colonialism itself. This injury can be felt in the loss and endangerment of our languages. Colonialism and the nationalization project have already resulted in the death of four languages in the Philippines while many more are endangered. This is because we are taught to privilege and replace our mother tongue for Spanish or English, the language of the colonizer, or Tagalog, the language of the local elites. We also suffer the loss of our culture or we face severe and irreversible damages to our culture. The consequence of this is that we become less and less rooted in our community and become more of what dominant society wants us to be.

B. My Position in this Research

Before proceeding further however an explanation of where I am situated within this project is important. I am writing an autoethnography and attempting to and
claiming to write a “history from below” or a rewriting of history from the point of view of someone who does not belong to the hegemony and the dominant discourses of history. I have been questioned however whether this work is really a history from below or if it even represents the stories of the oppressed.

First, I do not claim to speak for all or to be representative of all the oppressed peoples of the world. Although I claim an identity to or belonging to the Ilokano community, my experiences do not represent theirs and my experiences and theirs are not in essence the same; however, just because they are not the same does not mean that they do not have similarities. What I am saying instead is that my life is entangled with countless others in a multi-layered sequence of historical, political, and social events that have affected our lives in various ways. My story therefore is just one of many accounts, perspectives, and voices that tell a bigger story. My argument is that a single individual story is never just that. It is in fact a story of the collective, a part of a people’s story that once put together shows the bigger picture of various forces and phenomena that has affected and continue to influence our lives.

Second, I recognize that I am writing from a position of bundled contradictions where I am positioned within those of the oppressed but also holding varying degrees of privilege at the same time. However, just because I hold a certain amount of privilege does not mean that my point of view is insignificant and that my voice should not be heard.

I am college-educated and I have the opportunity and power to tell my story and the story of my Ilokano community as well. I am a researcher and writer identifying myself as indigenous to Ilocos Norte, Philippines but I am educated and trained in
Western thought and methodology. Am I an outsider or an insider in this project? This is the “disconnection” that Linda Tuhiwai-Smith talks about in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. She says, “There are a number of ethical, cultural, political and personal issues that can present special difficulties for indigenous researchers who, in their own communities, work partially as insiders, and are often employed for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries.”¹ In this case I am not only separated by education but also by location, citizenship, and other privileges apparent and unrealized.

Although I am a naturalized U.S. citizen, I identify myself first and foremost as an Ilokano. It is a political identity I claim to subvert racial identities ascribed to me and to assert my awareness of this classification. By claiming an Ilokano identity, I choose to acknowledge the indigenous knowledge and identity of my Ilokano ancestors who are the original inhabitants of the northernmost area of the island of Luzon in the Philippines. At the same time I am asserting an Ilokano identity that is dynamic and not fossilized to account for the seemingly voluntary but ultimately forced migration of Filipinos and more specifically Ilokanos out of our homeland. Ilokanos such as myself in the diaspora are severed from our homeland and disconnected from our ties to what some people have claimed as an “authentic” culture and identity. This personal claim therefore is implicating and including other Ilokanos to account for our stories and experiences outside of certain dominant Ilokano stories. We, outside of the homeland, are landless or some would say “home-less” because we are neither here nor there.

The identity that I am subscribing to is against a monolithic identity. I recognize that identity is never permanent, fixed, or unalterable. The claim I am making to specific identities is a choice I have made in order to claim a sense of belonging to a specific community/communities and position my work amongst the narratives and experiences of that community. This identity claim is also for the purposes of collaboration from shared experiences and struggle, understanding, and awareness.

The concern and problem about the limitations of my claim to an Ilokano identity stem from those who ascribe to a fixed definition of identity and that there is such a things as an authentic and pure Ilokano identity. They have called my Ilokano-ness into question and I have been accused of being inauthentic. They have questioned the fact that I reside in the United States and I hold a United States passport while living as a settler in Hawai‘i, which is itself under the colonial subjugation of the United States Empire. Can I still claim to be Ilokano when the land that now shelters me is no longer Ilocos? Can I still claim to be Ilokano when the world around me is no longer Ilokano? How much then can I claim?

Claiming an Ilokano identity and more specifically an Ilokano immigrant identity instead of an American or a Filipino-American identity means that I am also challenging these homogenizing identities. As a naturalized citizen, I am legally an American on paper and yet I am not referred to as such. Instead, I am referred to as Filipino-American or Asian American. Does this hyphenated identity signal that I am not a full American? Furthermore, who gets to be identified as just American and who gets a hyphenated

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identity? As a person of color, this hyphenation marks my difference. Since I am not white, the norm, I am a racialized “Other.”

While there is a refusal for others to see me as an American, there is also a part of me that feels uneasy to claim an American identity because of my personal experiences of exclusion and my awareness of the colonial reality of Hawai‘i. Claiming an American identity would mean further silencing and making invisible the voices, presence, and claims of Indigenous Peoples’ who have inhabited North America, South America, and Hawai‘i before Columbus even set sail and who at their expense created what is now the United States, Canada, Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana.

The assertion of my Ilokano identity above the many layers of identity that constitutes who I am is a political act because I intend to highlight and unravel these pieces of identities that are ascribed to us and those that we claim. The assertion of my Ilokano identity over my Filipino identity is to call attention to the heterogeneous and diverse groups of people that make up the Filipino population who are all subsumed under the Filipino national identity.

The term Filipino was introduced by the Spanish colonizers who claimed and named what is now the Philippines, Las Islas Filipinas, for and after King Phillip of Spain. They used this term to distinguish Philippine-born Spanish individuals, Filipinos, from the original inhabitants of the Philippines who they called Indios (Indians), and from those of mixed Spanish and Native ancestry, Mestizos. Filipino identity was eventually appropriated by the Tagalog elites who were installed as the ruling class in the

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Philippines to distinguish themselves from the rest of the Philippine population because they saw themselves as “civilized” with their Western education, wealth, and exposure to European culture. Under the nationalist project, the term Filipino was expanded to include all the inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago. This is why I grew up singing the national anthem, *Lupang Hinirang* (Chosen Land), and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Philippine flag in Tagalog eventually passed off as “Filipino” to inaugurate my colonization, now internal, now as sinister as my previous colonized experience. Growing up in the Philippines, we were taught our national identity as Filipinos regardless of which religion, location, indigenous group, or ethno-linguistic group we belonged to.

In the Ilocos region where I was born and raised, I identified myself as Ilokano and others identified me as Ilokano as well because the Ilokano language I spoke marked my ethno-linguistic identity. However, the television, my textbooks in school, my teachers, billboards, and movies all told a different story. I was taught that I was Filipino first or at the very least these forces tried to repress my *Ilokano-ness*. I was taught to give up my indigeneity and sacrifice it to the national identity. In school, we were taught the English language and the Tagalog language dubbed as Filipino, the national language of the Philippines. We were also taught the history and culture of the Tagalog elites, the Spanish, and the American colonizers. On the other hand, there was no formal Ilokano language education nor were there any teachings regarding the history, culture, and languages of other ethno-linguistic or indigenous groups in the Philippines. Formal education privileged the history of the Tagalog people and their language while it erased and ignored all other ethno-linguistic languages and history. As a result, my Ilokano
identity took a backseat to my Filipino national identity. I, much like other Filipinos that migrate to the United States carry this identity crisis, which becomes even more blurred by the addition of an American identity.

C. Statement of the Problem

To give a specific direction to this work, I wish to raise this question: Given a layered experience of systematic forgetting of who I am as (a) an Ilokano, (b) as an Ilokano woman, and (c) as an Ilokano woman immigrant in Hawai‘i, how can I summon back my story of who I am? Corollary to this question, what other stories written and apart from my own are implicated? In summoning back the power of the word, how could the story of my life be structured so that I would finally be able to name the trauma of my forgetting? In doing the act of remembering, what are the aspects of my story that will inaugurate my healing?

D. Statement of Objectives

The aim of this work is to explore storytelling as a mode of producing knowledge that makes the storyteller return to the power of her word, her language, and her memory. Corollary to this aim is to produce a story that reveals the power of affirming the need for a colonized subjectivity to inaugurate the way to decolonizing by returning to the sources of liberation both from within and from without, from the internal and the external, from the personal and social, from the familiar and the strange. To come to terms with all of these is to put together a coherent story of awareness of the emancipating power of a decolonized subjectivity.
E. Significance

The act of decolonizing one’s life story is an act of healing. In my telling my story as a colonized Ilokano subject, I hope to provide an example of how to remember again so that in this act of remembrance, I can inaugurate my very own act of healing. Healing is never just personal; it implicates others. I hope to create a space for all of us to heal. In the Ilokano tradition of storymaking, stories were what we were, but with the imposed narrative of domination, and we learned to tell other people’s stories, but have forgotten to tell our own. I hope that with this work, I will be able to show the way to that tradition and recast it in light of our immigrant experience in Hawai‘i.

F. Scope and Limitations

In this research I need to acknowledge and declare the scope and limitations of this work. First I want to declare that the use of memory, my own memory, has its limitations. Memory is nebulous, opaque, often times a tentative terrain. It is not an easy geography of the mind. The English language, which has become my primary language, now conveys this memory but it is a memory born from an Ilokano mediated experience. As a result, there is a chasm, a ghost, which separates that kind of memory mediated by the Ilokano language and that memory articulated in the English language, a language alien to that experience.

Second I would like to acknowledge that by unearthing this memory at this specific point in time and writing it down, I am branding this memory in the present. This memory then becomes fossilized because I am located in the now and recalling and accessing a memory of times past. There are obviously areas of my mind that I cannot go
into any longer and memories that I can no longer recall because memory is porous, there are no clear boundaries. This memory is a memory understood in the context of the present. I am now interpreting what was there in the context of what is now.

Third, because of the nature of this work, it is best fitted and expressed in the language of my own people because that is where I drew this memory from and what this recollection is all about. However, under the present circumstances of the limitations within the university and the resources available, it has restrained my ability to go to that extent. As a result, this limits my capacity to retell my story. I must further acknowledge that I am to some extent disloyal to my people because I am writing this research not in the language of my people but in the language of other people.

Fourth, another limitation of this work is that I am looking, understanding, and articulating everything through my eyes as an Ilokano woman in Hawai‘i. This gaze sets the boundary hence the scope of this research. This positionality limits but at the same time provides an infinite possibility at the key issues of this work.

G. Organization of the Study:

This chapter, *Pakauna*/Introduction, has provided an introduction to the problem of silencing the colonized/indigenous voice through the colonial project. It is also a summary of the necessity of these voices to add to the discourse in order to destroy the dominance of Euro-US claims to knowledge and a single absolute “Truth.” This section also contains a review of related literature that will clarify and analyze the problem. I first look at the problem with the writing of history because there are many voices that are elided and silenced. I am grounding my work in the conversation with Postcolonial Theory, Subaltern Studies, and Indigenous Theory because of the necessity to re-write
our own histories or “history from below.” In addition, I am also reviewing literatures regarding Ilokanos and the violence that they are subjected to as they move back and forth in various spaces of empire specifically in the Philippines and Hawai‘i. There is a layering of oppression, invisibility, and silencing that Ilokanos are subjected to in the Philippines and in Hawai‘i through colonial education, nationalism in the Philippines, and the racialization/homogenization into Filipinos, Filipino-Americans, and Asian-Americans in Hawai‘i.

I look at important literature regarding autoethnography, my method and methodology, from Carolyn Ellis, Heewon Chang, and Deborah Reed-Danahay. I look at how it has been previously used but I also explore a way in which I can make it my own by indigenizing and also rooting it into Ilokano indigenous tradition. I also look into indigenous storytelling in order to look into the long tradition of storytelling within indigenous communities as a way of constructing and perpetuating culture. It is important to draw from this tradition in order to present the voices of the indigenous that have been rendered invisible and inaccessible. I also hope to privilege Ilokano voices as I am implicating their voices while I write my story therefore I will also look into the methodology of pakasaritaan by looking at Saritaan ken sukisok and Kabambannuagan by Aurelio Agcaoili.

Chapter 2 titled, Panagramut/Taking Root, deals with my story of growing up in the Philippines during and after the presidency and dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. Many of the stories during this period focuses or are transfixed on Manila, the capital of the Philippines. However, I want to highlight other stories of this time, stories from the periphery so that other voices are not lost. This story shows how the politics at the center
were affecting village life, the power dynamics between Marcos supporters and his enemies and all those in between, and the violent atmosphere of the time.

Chapter 3 titled, *Pannakaguduagudua/Split/Broken/Halved*, investigates my first encounter with colonial education in the Philippines. The history of colonialism in the Philippines has resulted in an educational system, both private and public, that is centered on Westernized knowledge and ideals interwoven with a monolithic education based on the nationalist project of those Filipino elites in power. This education was repressive because it underscores the competing power relations between the colonial and the nationalistic projects both of whom were vying for dominance. Those Filipino elites in power were campaigning for one language, one culture, and allegiance to the Philippine nation-state but at the same time subscribing to the continued authority of Western thought, governance, and economic system. Overall, this double-edged education erases the presence of other groups and their culture while at the same time disrupts the connection they have made in their community and cultural identity because of their indoctrination in school.

Chapter 4 titled, *Pannakaparut/Uprootedness*, explores the destruction of the myth of the American Dream. Many immigrants have been lured to the United States because of this myth that promises wealth, prosperity, opportunities, and new beginnings. While this may be realized by some, many find that what is awaiting them is not what was promised. Instead they are faced with poverty and discrimination. It is not the America that is advertised; however even if it is not realized in the destination country, it continues to be perpetuated.
Chapter 5 titled, *Panagkalkallautang*/Aimless Wandering, examines another set of colonial education at work in Hawai‘i as it is appropriated under the American Empire. As I migrate from one location of empire, the Philippines, indirectly controlled by the United States to one that is still controlled by and subsumed under the United States Empire, Hawai‘i, two sets of educational systems are implemented which are both similar and different. They are different because of their temporal and spatial locations and both concern different people; however, they are similar because both elide the voices of indigenous and other ethnolinguistic groups. Both try to shape and create loyal colonial subjects; however, it manifests itself in a variety of ways. In Hawai‘i this specific type of colonial education has created subjects who police others who stray too far from what is accepted. I was pressured to conform and was violently molded into a specific type of colonized subject.

Chapter 6 titled, *Panagkawili*/Return, highlights how language is rooted in a specific community, a place, and a history. However, because of colonialism and the United States Empire that has forced my family and other Filipinos to migrate out of the Philippines, the pressure to assimilate causes certain negative consequences. In my case, I experience a trauma in my language and identity. I could no longer speak instead I had to relearn it.

Chapter 7 titled, *Pakadagupan*/Summary is the conclusion of the various themes presented in this work. It also includes a reflection of my journey writing this thesis and what I have learned.
II. Review of Related Literature

“What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open.”
- Muriel Rukeyser

I write my story as an Ilokano immigrant to Hawa‘i by looking at my journey as a child uprooted from the land of my birth to the shores of Hawa‘i, where I grew up and continue to live. These experiences have shaped my understanding and perspective of the world. At the same time, I am not alone. There are many like me who have experienced the same disruptions and systems of oppression. My story can act as testimony to challenge these systems and provide a different way of looking at our collective experiences.

A. History: Who has been writing it?

Who has had the opportunity and power to create, define, and write about the events of the past? One needs only to look at the pages of history textbooks that were provided in grade schools to realize that they showcase the story of the victors or those who had the power to “make history.” This specific kind of History, with a capital H, written by those in power is also legitimized as the only “real” history. The “discipline of history” validated by the Western academy has been severely criticized and challenged by feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, postmodern, subaltern, and indigenous studies theorists.

Feminist historiographers say that this History is a story of patriarchy, which they condemn for “creating and reflecting an exclusively masculine view of the world and for

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rendering women’s experiences and women’s perspectives invisible.”

Furthermore, in her essay, “Patriarchy,” Kathy Ferguson writes, “Thus patriarchy establishes male dominance in its basic accounts of the world and its standards of knowledge and judgment, as well as in its concrete institutions and practices.”

Those in Subaltern Studies, while originally focused on Indian past, criticizes History as an “elite history” which has deleted “the politics of the people.”

This elite history according to Ranajit Guha “dominated by elitism – colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism” mainly highlights “elite achievements.”

Within critical indigenous studies the creation of this historiography is criticized as coinciding with the denial and repression of indigenous histories, which have been reduced merely as “oral history.”

According to Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, “The negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology, partly because such views were regarded as clearly ‘primitive’ and ‘incorrect’ and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization.”

Indigenous histories therefore pose a threat to the very foundation of colonialism and the institutions of power built upon it. As a result, dominant History is a colonial history told from the point of view of the colonizer and according to Smith is “assembled around a set of interconnected ideas” such as “the idea that history is a totalizing discourse,” “the idea

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7 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 33.
12 Ibid., 29.
13 Ibid., 30.
that there is a universal history,” “the idea that history is one large chronology,” “the idea that history is about development,” “the idea that history is about a self-actualizing human subject,” “the idea that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative,” “the idea that history as a discipline is innocent,” “the idea that history is constructed around binary categories,” and “the idea that history is patriarchal.”

This Hegelian view of history that is linear, progressive, individualistic, and universal is a negating force because it bifurcates between a Western “us” in direct opposition to “them,” the “Other,” and orders groups of people in a social hierarchy. The rational basis is the West while projecting and designating out to the “Other” what it is not. The “Other” then becomes the irrational, “barbaric,” primitive, and savage.

The metanarrative of History therefore is damaging and problematic not only because it is full of lies, biased, and imprecise, but it is controlled by those who have had the power write and construct it. Those in power created this History and they have maintained it. Smith writes:

> History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and ‘Othered’. In this sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the ‘truth’ will not alter the ‘fact’ that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.

While this History is a source of oppression for colonized and indigenous peoples, it is necessary if not vital to our survival to unravel and interrogate our pasts through our

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16 Ibid., 81, 93.
17 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 34.
own eyes instead of the colonial gaze. To decolonize our past, our histories, our stories therefore “requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes”\textsuperscript{18} which would then allow us to “act upon history.”\textsuperscript{19} To act upon history would mean to no longer stand by but instead engage with, interrogate, contest, expand, and reconstruct this history. One of the strategies utilized by indigenous peoples is telling stories. In this way, Indigenous storytelling can be decolonizing and lead us to a path of healing.

Edward Said notes that that certain stories, the colonizer’s stories, “are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world.”\textsuperscript{20} In resistance against colonizing narratives, Indigenous storytelling has also become a mode “colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history.”\textsuperscript{21} In the same way, Smith asserts,

\begin{quote}
Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

This is what she calls “rewriting and rerefighting our position in history.”\textsuperscript{23} By “re-membering,” speaking, and writing, we are attempting to respond to the consequences of “dis-membering” that has rendered us to lose our connection with our community, land, mother tongue, culture, and identity.\textsuperscript{24} By remembering, we are protesting against a system that is invested in our forgetting and instead we are choosing to no longer forget

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies}, 28.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Kallautang: Poetics of Diversity, Displacement, and Diaspora: Ilokano in the Americas Writing} (Honolulu: TMI Global Press, 2009), 24.
our oppression and reality. Remembering therefore is to “re-member” ourselves or become “members” of our community again, to piece ourselves back, and ultimately heal.\textsuperscript{25}

It is within this tradition that I position my work. To tell my story as an Ilokano woman is to follow in this tradition of resistance.

B. Mapping out the violence experienced by Ilokanos

This autoethnography touches many different themes such as origins, identity, language, colonial education, and migration. I am focusing mainly on the Ilokano experience within the Philippine nation-state, Ilokanos amongst other Filipinos within the U.S. nation-state, and Ilokanos within U.S. occupied Hawai‘i.

Where are the Ilokano voices and where are the Ilokano stories? We are the third largest ethno-linguistic group after the Tagalogs and Sebuanos, however our stories, our histories, have largely been ignored. We have been homogenized and rendered invisible by our previous colonizers, under Philippine nationalist hegemony, and under the discourse of the Filipino diaspora. On top of that Ilokanos make up the majority of those in the diaspora. In the United States we are racialized under the category Filipino and/or Filipino-American and even further homogenized under the category of Asian-American.

1. Origins and Historiography

It is difficult to make generalizations about who exactly are the peoples of the Philippine archipelago: where they come from, what their culture was/is, and how they have come to be. Many authors have tried to tackle that question however many border on homogenization and essentialization of a whole group of people that fall within the

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
national boundary of, originated from, or are descended from the Philippines and are compartmentalized within the category of Filipino.

Filipinos as we have come to be called comprise of many groups of people from different islands and localities in the Philippine archipelago. We possess just as many variations in language, culture, and people as we have in the different spaces that we built our communities on. When the Spanish arrived in the islands now known as the Philippines, they found communities of people who may or may not have identified with each other. Nonetheless these communities were clustered together to form the Philippines, a colony of Spain.

Before the arrival of the Spanish, there was no Philippines. There was no unified Philippine national boundary or nation-state; instead many communities lived across the islands. However, the archipelago already had a system of trade and political compacts amongst neighboring islands. There was also international trade with China, Japan, Ryukyu Kingdom, the islands of the South Pacific, and present day Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and India. At the same time, some of these political units or communities in the archipelago, due to trade relationships, proximity, and connections, were incorporated under the rule of these other kingdoms and territories.

According to colonial historiography, Philippine history begins with the arrival of Portuguese conquistador, Ferdinand Magellan (Fernão de Magalhães), on the 17th of March 1521 to the island of Homonhon. This statement is usually followed by the story or picture of the conversion of Rajah Humabon and his queen, Hara Amihan, to

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Christianity and the death of Magellan and some of his men by Datu Lapu-Lapu. It continues with the return of Spain through several expeditions ultimately conquering most of the archipelago by 1565 with the key victory against the Kingdom of Maynila to which it soon assigned as the capital of the newly acquired addition to the Spanish Empire.\textsuperscript{28} It was Ruy Lopez de Villalobos who claimed and named the islands of Samar and Leyte \textit{Las Islas Filipinas} in 1543 for Phillip II of Spain.

What Spain, Europe, and ultimately the United States knew about the Philippines came initially from the accounts of Spanish friars, colonial officials and administrators such as W. E. Retana, and conquistadors such as the account of the Magellan voyage by Antonio Pigafetta.\textsuperscript{29} U.S. colonial historiographies such as Blair and Robertson’s, \textit{The Philippines Islands 1493-1898},\textsuperscript{30} Frederic H. Sawyer’s, \textit{The Inhabitants of the Philippines},\textsuperscript{31} Dean Worcester’s, \textit{The Philippine Islands and their People},\textsuperscript{32} John Foreman’s \textit{The Philippine Islands},\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Philippine Islands: a political, geographical, ethnographical, social and commercial history of the Philippine Archipelago and its political dependencies, embracing the whole period of Spanish rule},\textsuperscript{34} and \textit{Philippine Islands: a political, geographical, ethnographical, social and commercial history of the Philippine Archipelago, embracing the whole period of Spanish rule, with the account of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898}, CD-ROM ed. (Quezon City: Bank of the Philippines, 2000).
\item Frederic Henry Read Sawyer, \textit{The Inhabitants of the Philippines} (S. Low, Marston and company, 1900).
\item Dean Conant Worcester, \textit{The Philippine Islands and Their People: a Record of Personal Observation and Experience, with a Short Summary of the More Important Facts in the History of the Archipelago} (The Macmillan company, 1898).
\end{itemize}
the succeeding American insular government,\textsuperscript{35} Ferdinand Blumentritt, and Felix M. Keesing also derived their accounts from these Spanish colonial historians.

Colonial historiography of the Philippine archipelago and its people began with the arrival of the Spanish. The written accounts of the Spanish explorers, conquistadors, and priests of their encounter and experiences with the people were compiled to write this historiography and were further reused and reinterpreted by U.S. colonial historians to their own versions which further reinforced previous accounts. Such colonial historiographies were written from the colonizer’s gaze blinded by Eurocentrism and the process of making the colonizer and the colonized.

What this historiography is missing are the voices of those whose history was being written about. It presents these groups of people as if they either did not exist before the arrival of the Spanish or that their histories did not matter. Colonial accounts then became the authority because they had the opportunity and means to create historiography.

For Ilokanos, many things that once were have been lost. Because the agenda of the Spanish friars were to convert them, many things that were believed to be or connected to “pagan” beliefs were burnt and destroyed by the Spanish. This has made recovering the origins and stories of Ilokanos difficult because of the lack of resources regarding pre-contact Ilokanos. It is therefore difficult to make a counter argument and look at history against the grain amidst an overwhelming number of colonial accounts and resources that tell something different.

2. Identity and Consciousness

Members of the Philippine population, those in the diaspora, and those who are descendants of those who have originated from the Philippines are identified as Filipinos or more specifically racialized under the rubric Filipino. The term that was used to homogenize a heterogeneous group of people, languages, and identities has rendered them all under a fixed and pure Filipino racial bloodline. However, this colonial concept of a racialized identity must be questioned because race is a social construction and has no biological foundation. How then do we come to identify ourselves as belonging to a certain group? If identity is not biologically fixed, how do we claim an identity?

Growing up in the Philippines, I remember the television would always refer to the Philippine population as Filipinos. There were songs, speeches, and newspaper and magazine articles, and advertisement that referred to all of us as Filipinos. We heard about “Filipino martyrs” who left the Philippines to become maids in places like Hong Kong, Singapore, and Kuwait, dancers, strippers, and prostitutes in Japan, and construction workers in Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and the United Arab Emirates so that they could “uplift the Filipinos” and the “Filipino nation.” In schools we were taught to identify ourselves to the world as Filipinos.

A Filipino identity since its creation by the Spanish colonizers is not only homogenizing but also rooted in the colonial discourse. It is based on the conquest and eventual clumping of people and territory into colonial territory/property. It is a colonial construction and definition that has been perpetuated and largely unquestioned. The creation of this identity, this colonial naming of the land and its people, occurred simultaneously with the violent act of conquest and pillaging whole groups of people into
subservience. It was created amidst this violence and at the same time it was a heinous and inhumane act to rename because it denied the identities and voices of such a diverse multitude of people.

On the other hand, this colonial concept has been appropriated by the nationalist agenda to claim of an existence of a Filipino identity. This nationalist concept of a Filipino identity they argue grew out of the awareness of a colonized condition and resistance against their colonizer, Spain. They claim that this consciousness culminated in the revolution against Spain.

According to popular historiographies by Teodoro Agoncillo and Renato Constantino, the movement against Spain was a unified single movement. The revolution that joined the masses and the elites unlike the peasant revolts according to nationalist historiographers was the epitome of counter-consciousness, anti-colonial consciousness emerging within the minds of Filipinos to challenge colonial control. Although initially divided and scattered, the many islands and peoples of the Philippines were grouped together under one country; however almost four centuries under the dominion of Spain through the superintendence of the friars, developed and created according to nationalist historian, Renato Constantino, a national Filipino consciousness that resulted in a revolution against Spain. This consciousness is defined by Constantino as “the manner by which a society in its development explains the world and views itself” and “it is the recognition of the changing nature of social forms, therefore it is an awareness of the necessity for basic and hence revolutionary change.”

This consciousness grew out of the identification of shared struggle and collaboration. Identity and consciousness

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37 Ibid., 6–7.
converged within both the elite Filipinos and the masses and gave rise to a national identity and a revolutionary consciousness that they all rallied behind. However Constantino claims that Filipino identity has been reduced to merely a nationality or a geographical category since this revolutionary consciousness was obliterated once the United States swept across the Philippines in a violent campaign to destroy the Revolution and acquire it for its empire during the often-ignored Philippine-American War.

First this nationalist promoted Filipino identity that came into being from a shared history, collaboration, and resistance against the colonizer is problematic because it suppresses the participation and contribution by the masses, elevates the contributions of the elites, and renders the movement by the masses unable to come to fruition without the participation of the elite. Spanish rule in the Philippines cannot be merely reduced to the Spanish colonizers and friars keeping the Philippine population in the darkness of Catholic codes and conduct for over 300 years. The people did not simply succumb to the imposed religion and knowledges of the colonizers, instead they appropriated them into their existing beliefs and practices. Furthermore, they also resisted. In response to subjugation, there was always resistance present. As Edward Said writes, “Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native.”

In the Philippine archipelago, the native population organized uprisings that grew in number and scale against the Spanish rulers throughout the span of Spanish presence in the Philippines. There were also Chinese, Dutch, Japanese, and Portuguese forces that disrupted and fought the Spanish rulers. Also some

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38 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xii.
of the Muslim communities in Mindanao which are often erased or ignored by most Philippine or Filipino historians also proved to be one of the biggest difficulties for the Spanish rulers because they believed that they were never conquered or subjugated by them and therefore are not part of the Philippines that Spain came to claim.

There is an erasure of resistance or an undervaluing of the contribution of the masses. The masses were involved in many continuous rebellions against the Spanish colonizers since the beginning of Spanish colonialism. The nationalist version of this usually reduces these peasant rebellions as too “nativist”, “primitive”, and had “low level of consciousness”\textsuperscript{40} to repel the colonizer. They claim that such resistances were small, reactionary, instinctive, or regional. Constantino argues:

\begin{quote}
The early nativistic revolts were instinctual mass actions with weak theoretical guide posts. They were localized reactions to particular grievances against the impositions and exactions of the colonizers. Although they were anti-Spaniard, these revolts not anti-colonial in the sense that there was as yet no awareness of the need to destroy the framework of colonialism itself. Nativism was not and could not be enough of a sustaining force. Moreover, the weak organizational structure of native society was no match for the superiority of Spanish arms and the psychological ascendancy which the friars had over a Catholicized population \ldots After each revolt the people would sink into a state of quiescence once more, only to be goaded by the same abuses and exactions to rise again in one locality or another.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Second this nationalist definition of a Filipino identity erases the complicity of elite Filipinos in the subjugation of their own people. Throughout the history of resistance of the whole archipelago, not all of the Philippine population resisted. Some collaborated with the Spanish colonizers in their quest for self-preservation, procurement

\textsuperscript{40} Constantino, \textit{Identity and Consciousness}, 13.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 15.
of privileges and power, and security. The status and power that was granted to these collaborators established the difference between them and the masses. As a result this class of Filipino elites, sometimes called ilustrados or mestizos, was created.

Furthermore, this unified Filipino identity ignores the resistance by the masses against the Filipino elites who served the interests of colonizer and their own interest of maintaining their status in society. However by the 1880s opposition to colonial authority and its abuses also grew within the elites.\(^\text{42}\) Since the creation of an elite class of Filipinos, the elite classes were able to accumulate a certain amount of power and money and as a result, they were able to send their children off to schools in Europe. The liberal Western education that these young elites such as renowned Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal, and Marcelo H. del Pilar received awakened their eyes to the atrocities done by the colonial government. As a result, they created a movement called the Propaganda Movement calling for reforms. They were asking for representation in the *Cortes Generales*, Spanish Parliament, a secular public school system, human rights, equality, and equal opportunity.\(^\text{43}\)

It is however problematic to think about Filipino identity as a unified entity or even a fixed Filipino identity that was created by shared struggle because the revolution was viewed differently from the eyes of the elites to the eyes of the masses. The Filipino nationalist movement created by the Filipino elites and their children was born in the language of the colonizer and structured around Western ideals and understanding. It was less about the masses but more about their own self-interests similar to British settlers in the North American continent who were asking Britain for representation and


\(^{43}\) Ibid.
other freedoms in 1776. These elite white men wanted to keep their own wealth instead of paying taxes to Britain and they wanted greater power for themselves. They were not asking to secure rights and equal treatment to be extended to black slaves, Native Americans, or women. These elite Filipinos were not originally interested about the well-being and claims of the indigenous populations, the Muslims in Mindanao, and those non-Christianized populations trying to hold on to their animistic or traditional beliefs. What these elite Filipinos were asking for was inclusion. They wanted to be recognized by their colonial master as equal and civilized citizens of Spain. They were not asking for independence nor were they asking to be recognized as Filipinos. What nationalist historiographers fail to see are the diverse narratives of other resistances. The movement against Spain was not as they portray a unified single movement. Failing to recognize other resistances means that they are privileging a certain voice and perspective which is that of the Tagalog elites. Although there were members of the Filipino population in different regions who were elevated to the elite status within their own locales, the dominant narratives of the whole group dubbed as Filipino elites were the Tagalogs of Manila, the center of Spanish rule.

Furthermore, there is danger associated with thinking that an essential Filipino identity was created because it omits the differences amongst a vast group of people, silences groups of people who may have collaborated amongst each other but did not necessarily identify with each other as a single group, and creates a monolithic Filipino experience in the struggles. This already assumes that there is an essential Filipino identity, a Filipino consciousness, and a fixed national boundary. This nationalist rhetoric is dangerous because it posits the Philippines as a single entity, as a unified
whole, and undivided by class, ethnicity, and linguistic differences. This take on a Filipino identity reproduces the colonial construction of this identity. This inherited colonial concept, although utilized by the nationalists as a source of power to unite and collaborate, becomes a source of internal colonization.

This national Filipino identity that was founded on national revolutionary consciousness of being a colonized people is not innocent. Since the convergence of the elites with the masses to form the Revolution against Spain, the elites took over the movement. It was no longer about the interest and priorities of the different indigenous and ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines. Instead, they were subsumed under one identity.

Miriam E. Pascua, in the foreword of *Sukimat: Researches on the Ilokano and Amianan Studies*, argues, “In the interest of a political project to render us all “Filipinos”, we have forgotten that there have been other ethnolinguistic groups that have existed prior to this political identity we call the Philippines.” It has been forgotten that a Filipino identity and the national boundary of the Philippines were created by the colonial project and eventually utilized by the national campaign. On top of that, we have forgotten our roots because of these systems that have made us forget. It is therefore necessary to rename ourselves and reclaim our identity first.

For Ilokanos, we knew since our beginnings as Ilokano people that we are Ilokanos. We are Ilokano beings in our hearts, minds, and bodies. We are people of the Amianan, which means north; however, it means more than that. It is also the land/earth from which we come from and from which we become. We possessed an Ilokano

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identity and an Ilokano nation even before “we ever thought of claiming our new political
identity as Filipinos as a result of the outsider – and invader and colonizer – naming
us.”

Pascua outlines our task and responsibility as Ilokano people, as Amianan people,
and as an Ilokano nation rooted in the Amianan and the imagination:

This idea that in the act of resisting our homogenization in
the interest of an abstract project of Philippine nationhood,
we ought not to lose our names, we ought not to lose our
sense of self, we ought not to lose our nation in an
ethnolinguistic sense, as it were… We must make a vow to
make it happen that the “nations” in the equation in the
bigger notion of the “nation” are not to be left out but are
included as terms in that equation. In failing to do that, we
shall have failed our people, we shall have failed our
communities, we shall have failed the Ilokano and
Amianan nation, we shall have failed the Philippine nation
as well.

Consciousness or nakem is “the very consciousness of the Ilokano, the core of his
being and becoming.” Rooted in the word nakem is the concept, nanakem, which
means “the state of becoming.” These two terms highlight the idea that identity, which
is inseparable from consciousness, is not static. It is a continual process never fully
complete and always shifting.

This notion of identity as always shifting is a criticism made by many who claim
that identity is fickle and has no biological or true bearing. There is no essence, no pure
core being; therefore, as a result, those in the diaspora are criticized for claiming a
Filipino identity. They are criticized for being “out of touch,” disconnected, or no longer

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 2.
47 Aurelio Agcaoili, Saritaan Ken Sukisok: Discourse and Research in Ilokano Language, Culture, and
Politics (Initial Proceedings of the 2006 Nakem Centennial Conference) (Honolulu, HI: University of
Hawai‘i Ilokano Language and Literature Program, 2006), 1.
48 Ibid.
part of the Philippines nor do they experience a shared reality with most Filipinos. The
question of a Filipino identity is still explored by many not to fix its definition but
because they recognize its enablements. Marxist historiographer and member of the
diasporic community, Epifanio San Juan explores the predicament of Filipino identity,
Filipino-American identity, and Asian-American identity. He criticizes Theodore
Gochenour in *Considering Filipinos* and Alfredo and Grace Roces in *Culture Shock* who
write about an essentialized Filipino but at the same time San Juan acknowledges that
“shying away from fixities, generalizations, and stereotypes, we end up ironically with a
conundrum, perhaps a postmodern riddle.”49 He explains that his use of identity is “not a
matter of isolating a given substance or quality, an inimitable essence; rather, it is a
matter of referencing a grid of multivariable relations, a constellation of movements,
trajectories, interactions – games of positioning, if you like, with life-or-death stakes.”50
Claims to identity and identity politics can be a source of power if it is “transformed into
a habitat for opposition and resistance.”51

On the other hand, Dylan Rodriguez in *Suspended Apocalypse* argues against a
Filipino identity and a Filipino American identity. Current understanding and
conceptions of a Filipino identity and Filipino American identity elides the colonial/white
supremacist project, violence, genocide, and neocolonial rule within which they were
created. These racialized concepts assume cultural similarities and presumed biological
similarities. While he deconstructs the notion of an Asian-American identity, he also

49 E. Jr.” San Juan and Epifanio San Juan, *From Exile To Diaspora: Versions Of The Filipino Experience In
50 Ibid., 3–4.
51 Ibid., 6.
traces the Filipino condition by historicizing it and connecting it to Filipino genocide that started during the United States colonialism of the Philippines. He writes:

. . . the production of the “Filipino American” is defined – essentially and fundamentally – by a complex, largely disavowed, and almost entirely undertheorized relation to a nexus of profound racial and white supremacist violence. Prior to and during the material articulation of those embryonic forms of empire and colonialism that are inscribed on the Philippine local and Filipino global conditions, techniques of social liquidation (including and exceeding biological and physical extermination) condensed on the bodies of Filipinos within and across a diversity of cultural geographies (from the incipient metropol to indigenous territories). The ongoing consequence of this historical encounter is a relation of violent alienation with modernity, the colonial state, and the nation-state form itself. Yet the coherence of Filipino American subjectivity relies on the persistent rearticulation and dispersal of this alienation, such that white supremacist colonization and genocidal conquest constitute laboriously distanced points of radical disruption and disintegration for the telos of Filipino and Filipino American identity.”

This is further specified within the context of another location of U.S. Empire, Hawai‘i. I feel it is necessary to problematize our identities as Filipino, Filipino American, and Asian Americans in Hawai‘i and juxtapose such identities with Native Hawaiians who were and continue to be colonized by and illegally incorporated to the imperial United States of America. Our identities as “locals,” a term that first gained traction during the Massie case in Hawai‘i in order to refer to the five young men accused of raping a white military officer’s wife and to differentiate them against the white “haoles,” and our identities as immigrants must be rearticulated within the framework of settler colonialism. It is insufficient to discuss Hawai‘i only within race and/or ethnic relations.

because it erases the history and current reality of its indigenous population whose land, people, and government has been stolen and violated.

Additionally it is insufficient to talk about Filipino identity, Filipino-American identity, Asian-American identity, etc. without historicizing the context within which these terms were constructed and without historicizing the reason why people come to move. The migration of various groups of people to Hawai‘i was a direct result of empire building. Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Pacific Islanders, and other groups all moved because of this history of colonialism. Many of these groups since then have settled in Hawai‘i and made it their home. Unfortunately some of them have assimilated into the dominant colonial culture, gained power, and moved up the socioeconomic ladder and have contributed and/or are complicit in the continued disenfranchisement and dispossession of Native Hawaiians. According to Dean Itsuji Saranillio’s paper, Colonial Amnesia: Rethinking Filipino “American” Settler Empowerment in the U.S. Colony of Hawai‘i, in Positively No Filipinos Allowed: Building Communities and Discourse, he writes:

> Compared to more dominant groups, Filipinos in Hawai‘i lack social, economic, and political power, yet we often seek empowerment as “Americans” within a U.S. settler state. While Filipino communities in Hawai‘i must continue to resist various inequalities, we must also be aware of the colonial structures engrained in U.S. nationalism which render invisible the U.S. violation of Native Hawaiians’ human rights to self-determination."

Any such claim to an American identity therefore means that we are perpetuating the continued subjugation of Hawai‘i’s indigenous peoples and are submitting to the U.S. colonial hegemony. As settlers we must recognize that our very presence contribute to

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this subjugation in various ways. Also an additional problem lies in a claim to any sort of American identity when we recognize that Hawai‘i is a colony illegally overthrown and unjustifiably incorporated into the United States. Recognition of this injustice would mean that the very foundation of our United States citizenship, possession of a U.S. passport, and incorporation as the fiftieth state are on shaky ground. Saranillio argues, Because Filipinos in Hawai‘i live in a colony, our U.S. citizenship and desire for equality within a U.S. political system are crucial components of a complex hegemonic colonial structure that must be carefully questioned. For instance, although the term “Filipino American” combats the racist notion that only haole are Americans, it also asserts a U.S. nationality within a U.S. colony. For those committed to social justice, a U.S. identification is deeply problematic, because it is a colonial identity.54

We must therefore recognize our colonized subjectivities as we move from one empire to the next. We cannot subscribe and contribute to the same colonial structures that have colonized our own land and people in a new land. I purport therefore to reclaim our identities prior to our renaming by the colonizers not to subscribe to a romanticized notion of an identity but in order to bridge the gap between the past and the present. There is no single essence to an identity that fixes it to a specific period in time; however there is both a being and becoming. There is some essence that connects us to our community and identity but at the same time there is also a performing of, a becoming, and a claiming to an identity. Identity is both. It is not a singular “is” but instead identity is what “can be.” As we move from one place to another, from one time to another, from one experience to another, our identities shift but we cannot privilege what we have become we also must look back to where we came from.

54 Ibid., 126.
3. Migration

What is now popularly called the Filipino diaspora or outmigration has its history tied up with the Philippines’ long history of colonialism and subjugation. The Philippines has been conquered and colonized by three powers: Spain, Japan, and the United States. The Filipino people proclaimed their sovereignty and independence from Spain’s colonial rule on June 12, 1898; however, Spain would not admit that it was defeated by the Filipino people and would not recognize the newly created Republic of the Philippines. Following Spain’s defeat from the Spanish-American War, Spain knowingly and intentionally sold the Philippines, which they no longer controlled for the sum of $20 million to the United States. After 333 years under the colonial rule of Spain, the Philippines found itself under the control of another colonial power. From 1898 to 1946, the Philippines was under the colonial rule of the United States. After fighting the Spanish for independence and winning, the Filipino people were not easily subjugated by the American colonial forces. From 1899 to 1914 the revolutionaries fought and resisted the injustice of being subjugated under the United States through a series of conflicts that turned into the Philippine-American War. While the outbreak of the war began in 1899 and eventually terminated in 1902, resistance continued until 1914. “Pacification” of the Filipino people came at a price of 200,000 Filipino lives and almost 1,000,000 injuries. To render Filipinos submissive to U.S. rule, Filipinos were suppressed using genocidal tactics such as, “driving of the population from villages into guarded towns where starvation and disease killed thousands and everyone found outside these limits was shot, torturing and killing of prisoners and wounded, turning of cultivated areas into a burned-out ‘howling wilderness,’ branding of patriots as bandits and of advocates of
independence as criminals, executing or imprisoning them.” The United States, after pressures from anti-imperialist groups, eventually granted the Philippines autonomy in 1916, self-government in 1934, and independence in 1946.

The United States government defined its colonial rule in the Philippines as tutelage because colonial officials and the U.S. government believed that Filipinos were “unfit to govern themselves.” In a speech delivered by U.S. President William McKinley, he said, “we could not leave them to themselves – they were unfit for self-government – and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain’s was; and that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and to uplift and civilize and Christianize them.” Echoed by President McKinley, imperialist Americans believed that it was the duty and “burden” of the United States to “educate” and prepare the Filipinos to meet the challenges of independence. Under the guise of benevolence, the U.S. government declared that it was preparing the Philippines for independence and self-rule.

The United States set forth policies, enacted a formal government, created infrastructures, and established an educational system to legitimate their authority under the Manifest Destiny, which directed the U.S. the responsibility to indoctrinate and “save” the Filipinos from their primitive and anachronistic state. The myth of American benev­olence, which imply that the U.S. actually embraced their “little brown brothers”, erases the violence, exploitation and white supremacist ideals and practices implemented during U.S. colonialism.

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56 Ibid., 7.
One of these colonial policies is the installation of an economic system that kept the Philippine economy and Filipino people continually dependent on the U.S. Because the Philippines is rich resources such as coconut products, mineral ores, tobacco, abaca, and sugar, it was useful for U.S. capitalism. These raw materials were prohibited from being exported to any other country but the United States; therefore Philippine export was dependent on the U.S. market. The complete control and exploitation of Philippine natural resources by the United States devastated the Philippine economy. The Filipino people and the Philippine economy were not only dependent on the United States, but as a result it was rendered impoverished. The state of poverty that the Filipinos were in drove Filipinos out of their own country in order to find work elsewhere. As a result, the Filipinos became a cheap and ready labor supply for the “pull” of United States labor market in its quest for nation building. Changes in U.S. immigration policies due to the changing demands of national and international conditions created and shaped the trend in Filipino immigration.

The U.S. also distributed the folklore that America was the land of promise early on during U.S. colonialism in the Philippines prior to Filipino immigration to the United States. The notion that anyone can find success and that success can only be achieved in the United States erases the history of violence, racism, and social hierarchy that the American empire is built upon. The myth of the American dream serves to justify American superiority because it implies that America is literally littered with money and wealth. One of the ways in which this fantasy was perpetuated was by the introduction of new professions, travel opportunities, and educational opportunities in the United States, which opened up America’s landscape to the Filipino people. As a result, the myth of the
American dream had already taken refuge in the imagination of the Filipino people long before the arrival of Filipinos into the United States.

The infrastructures, systems of education, and public health that America implemented in the Philippines were used to create Filipino subjects who were prime carriers of American culture. Because of this system, it made it difficult for Filipinos to be proud of and to maintain their culture and language while being kept in a colonial state of mind where they were pressured and socialized to valorize the English language and American culture over their own. The myth of America’s benevolence and superiority resonated in this colonial mentality. American colonialism in the Philippines instilled in its Filipino subject a longing to be a part of and to partake in America, which has materialized into the influx of Filipinos into the United States.

During the Philippines’ colonial history, Filipinos have traveled or migrated out for various reasons. One of the earliest accounts occurred via the Manila Galleon Trades, merchant ships of imperial Spain carrying commodities from Asia to Latin America manned by Filipino seamen who were forced or assigned to work under Spanish navigators. In order to escape their state of servitude, they either ran away or jumped ship and settled in the southern ports of what is now the United States as early as 1763.

Other Filipino migrants to the United States included the sons of the Filipino elites who were permitted entry into the United States under the 1903 Pensionado Act in order to study and upon return to the Philippines, take on prominent positions in business, government, and education. It was intended to instill and embed American culture and

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the ideology of American exceptionalism based on the principles of democracy and individualism unto the Filipino people. Another reason for immigration during this period (1906-1946) included the recruitment of Filipinos as cheap and unskilled labor during the agricultural labor shortage in Hawai‘i where they worked in the sugar plantations and the west coast of the United States where they picked and harvested fruits and vegetables. They also worked seasonally in the canneries of Washington and Alaska. Majority of these laborers came from the Ilocos. Since then Ilokanos came to make up the majority of those in the Filipino diaspora.

Other Filipino migrants included Filipino military personnel and their dependents. Approximately 25,000 Filipino military servicemen who enlisted in the U.S. Navy were granted citizenship and entry into the United States from 1945-1960 due to their service during World War II. At the same time, laborers, students, and nurses under the 1948 U.S. Exchange Visitor Program also entered the United States.

What is now known as the Filipino diaspora is a combination of migrant workers who are employed seasonally, temporarily, and under contract for several years in Hong Kong, Korea, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other countries to work as domestic workers or construction workers and those who permanently migrate to the United States and Canada. After the liberalization of U.S. immigration policies under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, this act increased the amount of people that could enter the

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60 Foronda, Kailukuan, 25.
62 Ilano-Tenorio, Filipino Americans, Children of Immigrants, 19.
63 Foronda, Kailukuan, 25.
64 Ilano-Tenorio, Filipino Americans, Children of Immigrants, 20.
United States by 20,000 immigrants per country under the preference criteria system. It enabled entry to family members of those already in the United States, refugees, and professionals needed by the economy unlike previous Filipino immigrants. The post-1965 immigrants were educated in American style education system and were already ingrained with American culture through the history of colonialism between the United States and the Philippines accompanied by its neocolonial legacy. This experience implanted a desire to be a part of the “success” of America. As a result, there was an influx of Filipino immigration to the United States in search of the American dream.

Ilokanos make up the majority of those in the diaspora however the face and discourse of the Filipino diaspora remains to be Tagalog. As long as Filipino comes to be dominated by and privileges the Tagalog voice, history, and priorities, it is problematic. It has become a normalized classification of a whole nation and groups of people but at the same time it has silenced them and rendered their priorities and claims unimportant. How then can these groups of people under the umbrella of a Filipino identity collaborate and join together under a counterhegemonic struggle if they are internally oppressed by the homogenizing discourse of a Filipino identity? What then would it look like if we reassess the category of Filipino and recognize but also elevate our differences in order to stand on equal footing to resist oppressive forces on all fronts?

4. Language

Since Ilokanos are the third largest ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines, it means that Ilokano is also the third most spoken language in the Philippines. It has been estimated that twelve percent of the population are native Ilokano speakers while an

\[65\] Ibid., 21.
estimate by Ilokano language scholar, Prescila Espiritu, figures twenty million Ilokano speakers to include those who speak Ilokano within and outside the Philippines as a second, third, or foreign language.\(^67\) However even with this great number of native speakers, it suffers the same treatment as majority of the languages of the Philippines who also have a great number of native speakers. In the Philippines there are over a hundred languages, which reflects the heterogeneous population. However, English, the language of the last (and some would say still current) colonial master is still colonizing majority of these languages. At the same time there exists a double colonizing power that of the Tagalog language. Tagalog is internally colonizing all of the other languages of the Philippines.

The various and diverse ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines pass down the languages of their ancestors, their mother tongues, to their children and ultimately their community. Language is the way in which the world is taught and expressed to a person. It is embedded in culture and culture is also embedded in language. As a result, the mother tongue, the first language, is how one learns to see, understand, and articulate the world. In the Philippines however there is a disruption that affects this relationship as members of the population gather more exposure to the media, pop culture, and the educational system all of whom disproportionately utilize the Tagalog language, the English language, or a combination of both called Taglish. Movie stars, singers, and other media personalities are idolized by the masses not because they are similar to them or can identify with them but because they are different. They are enviable not only because of fame, wealth, and their proximity to the center of power, Manila, but also

because of their use of the languages of power. Many of them utilize both English and Tagalog and have also popularized the usage of both, Taglish. Media and pop culture are widespread and their influences are even more so. These media personalities are who the people look up to, emulate, and admire. They become role models and the standard for a multitude of people. When these so called role models communicate not in the languages of the people, this contributes to the feeling of inferiority towards one’s mother tongue. Moreover, two elite-owned media corporations, GMA and ABS-CBN, which is primarily, if not completely, in Tagalog, dominate the media. The other option besides the two is the subscription to U.S. cable channels, which are in English. There are no local or regional channels available. This results not only of the privileging of English and Tagalog but also of the erasure of all other languages. Although there are radio stations that still hold their shows in the local language, the age of television has rendered them old fashioned.

Celebrities and the media are not the only ones contributing to this. Politicians, government officials/employees, and business elites also proliferate the use of Tagalog and English, which have become the language of business and politics. They address the masses in these two languages without translation into the various languages of the many people of the Philippines. They expect the masses to learn these two languages in order to understand them and yet they do not make an effort to understand the people that they represent or deal with.

Furthermore, the educational system also has contributed greatly to the division of languages. From its creation, the educational system constructed by the U.S. colonizers and after some time inherited by the Filipino governing elites elevated the English and
Tagalog languages above the rest of the other languages of the archipelago. The chosen languages became not only the languages of business and politics, but also the languages of the educational institution. Upon entrance in kindergarten or pre-school, the children of the Philippines are taught their alphabets in Tagalog and English. They learn their vocabularies and nursery rhymes in these two languages as well. These two parallel paths of a formal Tagalog and English language instruction continue all throughout their primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Although the language of instruction may be in their regional or local languages, they receive formal language training in languages not their own, sometimes alien to their own lands. This act of a preferential treatment of languages legitimizes and ensures the dominance of English and Tagalog languages. This results in the mother tongue being downgraded to merely an informal, private, and conversational language. A more damaging effect of this is the gaining usage of these two languages instead of one’s own in order to participate in these colonizing institutions. A consequence of this is the danger it poses to the diversity of languages in the Philippines: extinction or endangerment.

There is also the selection of Tagalog by the Philippine government under president, Manuel Quezon, as the “national language” which has marginalized all the other languages. This act alone delegitimizes all other languages in the Philippines as if they do not matter. Along with its constitutional designation as the national language, Tagalog has been renamed by the nationalist movement as “Filipino.” Tagalog then becomes Filipino and Filipino becomes Tagalog. When Tagalog is repackaged and peddled as “Filipino” it results in an internal colonization of all other languages and
groups of people in the Philippines who are not ethnolinguistically Tagalog. The peoples and their languages are erased and portrayed as a monolithic whole. Agcaoili writes:

We must understand that this internal colonization is happening before our very eyes under the guise of a concept of a ‘national language’, which is as ambiguous as the concept of ‘nation’, with its proponents using a concept that they inherited from Europe and fundamentally Quezonian in perspective in what a national language is supposed to be. A Quezonian perspective of a ‘national language’ is all about this: (a) an insertion of a provision of the fundamental law of the land, the Philippine Constitution of 1935 to be precise that says that the ‘national language’, contrary to the spirit of the deliberations and consensus of the delegates of that constitutional convention, shall be based on “one of the existing” native language and not on the proviso that was agreed upon which was rendered as a national language “based on the existing languages” of the country; (b) a presidential perspective that reveals a laziness of the mind and a flawed character that does not make any attempt to speak with the Ilokanos in their own language and if he did want to speak with them, the Ilokanos should speak with him in his language, the heavenly and Manila-powered Tagalog, which leads us to the next point: (c) that for practical purposes, we ought to talk about the constraints of looking to a national language other than Tagalog, as what Benilda Santos reportedly said as her complimentary position to the shanghaiing mechanisms of the WIKA proponents of the Tagalog language as the constitutionally mandated language of all peoples of the Philippines, because, it is the language of Manila, the economic center of the country.  

The shift of Tagalog to Filipino, from one of the languages of the Philippines to the national language, and from heterogeneity to legitimacy shifted the advantages to one group of people at the expense of the other groups. This act alone has rendered groups of people invisible. Furthermore, Agcaoili argues, “The fact that this action is state sanctioned, with the blessing of the cultural, political, and economic institutions, this act

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68 Ibid.
renders it more atrocious and its violence on the consciousness of our peoples is incalculable.”

At the same time, there is the continued dominance of English over all the indigenous languages of the Philippines including Tagalog. It is also one of the official languages of the Philippines under the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines under Article XIV Section 7. English has remained in this position since its installation during the U.S. colonial era; however it has evolved into the global language of power in this era of globalization. According to Renato Constantino, “English has become a status symbol, while the native tongues are looked down upon.” Mastering English is no longer just an inheritance from the colonizer but a move towards necessity to compete in the world of business and politics.

These multiple systems although sometimes contradict each other also work together to produce these violences of repression and erasure. In the Philippines, these systems attempt to produce a monolithic homogeneous Filipino. As Filipinos move between different points of empire, from the birthland to the United States and Hawai‘i, they experience different but also very similar violences against their differences through the process of assimilation into the dominant culture. They undergo a process of a certain degree of erasure and an eventual absorption.

Because majority of those in the diaspora are Ilokanos, Ilokano scholar, Aurelio Agcaoili argues, “Ilokano is historically the language of the diaspora.” However this majority in number of Ilokanos in the overall Filipino diaspora to the United States does

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69 Ibid.
71 Agcaoili, “Series 1: The Search for Roots - or the Meaning of ’Ilokano’.”
not translate to visibility of their indigenous Ilokano identity and Ilokano linguistic identity. Instead they are identified under their national identity as Filipinos and the national language of Filipino.

There is also the addition of a second layer of dominance of the English language in the United States that overshadows the Ilokano language along with many languages of the indigenous peoples who were here before and those languages that were brought in by the many immigrants that settle within its national boundary. Although there is no official language of the United States, English has become the unofficial but standard language of communication in business, politics, and education. English is the invisible norm, a ghost, which solicits the consent of the population because of its normativity. Its power lies with its unofficial-ness. Because it is not designated as the official language, its dominance is difficult to question.

In Hawaiʻi, English also maintains its dominance. Unlike the continental United States that refuses to declare an official language, the State of Hawaiʻi has actually declared it as one of its official languages in its 1978 Constitution Article XV Section 4. Although Hawaiian is also declared as one of the official languages of the state, it is merely for show. There is no move towards a bilingual or multilingual Hawaiʻi population. The educational system teaches the English language to Hawaiʻi’s children as early as preschool or kindergarten regardless whether these kids are English speakers or not. Other languages are slowly introduced in middle school and high school such as Hawaiian, “Chinese” (Mandarin), Japanese, Spanish, and French but these are limited selections in comparison to the languages of the many people in Hawaiʻi.
5. Colonial Education

Public school education in the Philippines is primarily inherited from the United States colonial period in the Philippines but also appropriated by the Filipino elites to push the nationalist agenda. It is a Euro-U.S. centric institution established during a specific era for a specific purpose and although it has been utilized by the nationalist agenda, it retained its previous curriculum and structure that privileges Western thought and histories.

Renato Constantino in *The Miseducation of the Filipino* argues:

> The most effective means of subjugating a people is to capture their minds. Military victory does not necessarily signify conquest. As long as feeling of resistance remain in the hearts of the vanquished, no conqueror is secure . . . The molding of men’s minds is the best means of conquest. Education, therefore, serves as a weapon in wars of colonial conquest.  

After fighting a revolution against Spain, claiming victory, and initiating the construction of their own sovereign nation, the Philippine population found themselves threatened by a new conqueror. They were unyielding and did not want to succumb to yet another conqueror. This situation posed as a problem for the colonial agenda of the United States who quickly turned to education which was, according to General Arthur MacArthur, “as an adjunct to military operations calculated to pacify the people and to procure and expedite the restoration of tranquility throughout the archipelago.” The creation of a public educational system in a Philippines was therefore a colonial policy, to control and pacify a whole region and a whole group of people.

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73 Ibid., 3.
Constantino criticizes Filipino educational leaders because he argues that they fail to see that the American educational system that they have inherited and has since continued to perpetuate was constructed within a specific context of American colonial period and for the specific purpose of “correspond[ing] to the economic and political reality of American conquest.”\(^74\) This educational system therefore was not created for the Philippine population; however even with the addition of a national historiography and agenda, the colonial aspect of the public education system is still there. The Philippine education system therefore pushes two agendas: one that is colonial and the second that of the nationalist/elite-centric. Agcaoili argues:

> The brainwashing that continues to occur in the Philippine education system that teaches only a ‘victor’s’ perspective of Philippine culture and society – and the hyper-valuation that this brainwashing does, for instance, of the culture, language and history of the center which is fundamentally a Manila-centric/Tagalog-centric view of things Philippine – has (a) substantially erased the basic multicultural and multilingual character of the Philippine nation and (b) permitted the systematic forgetting of the liberation agendum for the evolution of a pluralist society. In the erasures that happened in history and which erasures that continue to happen, other cultural and linguistic expressions have relegated to footnotes, if lucky, with only the Tagalog-Manila world view being recognized as the legitimate one, this world view having been accorded a ‘national’ and ‘nationalist’ status while the rest of those other cultures and languages are only ‘regional’ and worse, ‘regionalistic.’\(^75\)

\(^74\) Ibid., 2.
III. Methodology and Methods

"That is part of the beauty of literature. You discover your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong."
- F. Scott Fitzgerald

In graduate school, I read stories, stories of colonized peoples, indigenous peoples, LGBTQ, women, and other marginalized people. I could feel the trauma and pain emanating from the pages and it evoked memories, emotions, and meaning in my own life. I was amazed that the same themes in their stories were also present in my own. I realized then that the same traumas in my life were not aberrations, anomalies, or atypical set of individual experiences; instead, they were universal traumas felt by different people in different ways.

When I decided to join this tradition of people writing their stories and priorities in their own voices, I was presented with the problem of how I was going to do this within the academy. Although this project was born within the setting of the Western academy, this very same structure is a colonized setting. It is dominated by and privileges Western epistemologies and axiologies that valorizes positivism and objectivity. How then was I to do a project that is clearly personal and subjective within this space? At the same time, I did not want to write an autobiography and simply just narrate the stories of my life. I was introduced to the research method called autoethnography which has allowed me the chance weave my story and the story of Ilokanos and other Filipinos in order to critique oppression, empire, colonialism, violence, migration, history, etc. all of which are interrelated. Autoethnography as a qualitative research approach that actually recognizes the inseparable nature between objectivity and subjectivity opens up the space in the academe for storytelling as a
critique, analysis, and a venue for personal healing. However, I wanted to root this project within indigenous storytelling to include our ancestors, our culture, and histories so as not to give preference to the individual and the present but instead to highlight survival and resistance.

A. Knowledge and Stories

I am drawing from the tradition of indigenous storytelling to write or more specifically re-write the story of my life as an Ilokano immigrant. This process of writing from my subjective point of view is an act of defiance against dominant narratives written “from above.” This rewriting is a decolonizing act to decolonize my story and at the same time decolonizing the story of the community. Because I am challenging and deconstructing Euro-American/Western methods of knowledge production, I am privileging the tradition of indigenous storytelling. That is where I will start because I must assert that as I write my story, I implicate others. It is not only my story; in fact, it is a story about a people, a story about a nation, a “history from below”, and a story of the “Other.”

Storytelling and oral histories are the ways in which knowledge, tradition, and culture have been passed down for generations in indigenous communities which still continues today. These stories are embedded with the values and beliefs of that culture. These stories tell us about our cultures, our common history, and a grounded consciousness of who we are. Hence it becomes an integral part of the culture as these stories are passed down to the future generation who in turn passes down these stories to the generation after them. These stories along with the storyteller “serve to connect the

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76 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 145.
77 Ibid.
past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story.”

By turning to the tradition of indigenous storytelling as a research method, I am arguing that it is insufficient to think about it as an alternative to or different from Western knowledge and dominant quantitative research methods. This way of thinking legitimizes the authority and places a higher value on Western knowledge and dominant research methods. Instead, I contend that indigenous methods have existed and still continue to exist in indigenous societies and it is critical to our existence and survival.

To explain this further, Marie Battiste, in her essay, “Research Ethics for Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage” in the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, says:

> Indigenous peoples around the world have lived in their natural contexts, acquiring and developing sustaining relationships with their environments and passing this knowledge and experience to succeeding generations through their language, culture, and heritage. Their acquired knowledge embodies a great wealth of science, philosophy, oral literature, art, and applied skills that have helped sustain Indigenous peoples and their land for millennia. From their elders and within their spiritual connections, Indigenous peoples have learned to heal themselves with the medicines of the earth that have been naturally part of their environment. They have observed the patterns in nature and learned how to live and flourish within them. This knowledge has been embedded in the collective community’s oral and literacy traditions; transmitted in the values, customs, and traditions; and passed on to each generation through their Indigenous language as instructed by the Creator and their elders.

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78 Ibid.
Based on this long tradition of indigenous knowledge and traditions, our indigenous ways and our truths are not the alternative, which denotes as coming after or secondary to something. Instead indigenous methods and traditions should be the primary way in which we base our understanding. Everything that we do should be grounded in indigenous ways of doing, understanding, and being. This is the reason why I elect to start within my own community and traditions first and foremost.

It is necessary to decentralize what we have been socialized to believe that there exists only a single “truth” and the way to the “truth” is through Western traditions. In its place we need to show what Russell Bishop calls “diversities of truth.” In order to do this it is integral to decolonize our understanding of truth and objectivity, which have silenced indigenous perspectives, dehumanized us, and have been utilized to control us. We need to begin to ask questions such as: Who has written and who has been writing about us? Who has been given the authority to write about us? Who has not been given the chance to write? Who has been silenced?

I wanted to expand and privilege the tradition of storytelling and oral stories because it centers on the indigenous perspective. I wanted to guarantee a space for the indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing. Also I wanted to make visible and stress that indigenous storytelling is never just about the act of telling stories. Stories have also become a vehicle for memories of the past to be retold in the present. These accounts and testimonies then shapes the present because they give evidence to the ways in which indigenous peoples have resisted and survived. It disrupts the dominant narrative that indigenous peoples are anachronistic and have perished. According to Stuart Rintoul as

quoted by Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, these stories evoke “memories of injustice.” Such memories decry indigenous peoples colonial past and present. They awaken voices of the past but more importantly they awaken voices of the present demanding to be heard and demanding social justice.

This is the realm within which I am writing my narrative. My stories are recollections of the injustice of colonialism where my voice is just one of the voices of many. Because mainstream History is suffering from a poverty of ideas and voices, it is critical to provide our own accounts, our own priorities, and our own points of view.

B. Autoethnography

I am borrowing from the tradition of qualitative research method called autoethnography; however I am also indigenizing it and queering it. Because I am challenging the hegemonic positivistic approach that dominate mainstream academic discourse and research methods, I do not want to subscribe to a single approach and merely follow an already set precedent. I want to redefine it and center the indigenous voice.

In order to understand the self, one must understand the relationship between the self and the social. Autoethnography is anti-positivist through its privileging of the author’s and researcher’s lived experiences and subjectivity. It challenges the dominance and authority of objectivity by making emotions and subjectivity visible and important. I am looking at my life story to look at the larger story of the people I identify with, Ilokanos. By choosing the process of autoethnography, I am utilizing my story as a vehicle and as a frame to look at other “selves” in the collective, the collective as a whole, and the social context in which we exist. Consequently, this autoethnography will

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81 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 144.
be analyzed and interpreted to explore our position and experiences within the historical
and current system and superstructure that govern our lives.

Autoethnography is defined as a type of autobiographical personal narrative that
not only involves writing about the self but about the self in relation to culture with an
emphasis on interpretation and cultural analysis. As Carolyn Ellis says, “it is an
autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of
consciousness.” 82 These layers of consciousness that are integral to autoethnography
involves looking through multiple lenses. She explains this further:

Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look
through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward
on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience;
then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is
moved by and may move through, refract, and resist
cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and
forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the
personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond
distinct recognition.” 83

The intertwining and inseparable nature between culture and the individual along with the
relationship between the self and others are the foundation of autoethnography. These
three concepts: self, other, and culture are all interrelated and interconnected.

Autoethnography is written in the first person in which the ethnographer’s self is
the first person voice. Deborah E. Reed-Danahay calls the autoethnographer a
“boundary-crosser” 84 because he/she possesses a dual identity or what W.E.B. Du Bois
calls a “double consciousness.” The autoethnographer acts as both the writer and subject
of the autoethnography. It is a self-reflexive project that is liberating and urges the writer

82 Carolyn Ellis, The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography (Altamira Press,
2003), 37.
83 Ibid., 37–38.
84 Deborah Reed-Danahay, ed., Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social (Oxford; New
to examine his/her ascribed identities. Memories, which are the medium in which life stories are retold, are an integral part in the construction of identity. It shows the connection between the self and history and identity and history.

It is a terminology that has broad application, different versions, and means differently to different people. It encompasses different forms of writing that include:

- autobiographical ethnography, autobiography, autoobservation, autopathography, collaborative autobiography, complete-member research, confessional tales, critical autobiography, emotional narratives of the self, ethnobiography, ethnographic autobiography, ethnographic memoir, ethnographic poetics, ethnographic short stories, evocative narratives, experiential texts, first person accounts, impressionistic accounts, indigenous ethnography, interpretive biography, literary tales, lived experience, narrative ethnography, native ethnography, new experimental ethnography, opportunistic research, personal essays, personal ethnography, personal experience narrative, personal narrative, postmodern ethnography, radical empiricism, reflexive ethnography, self-ethnography, self-stories, socioautobiography, sociopoetics, writing-stories

Ellis also adds phenomenological ethnography, psychobiography, evocative ethnography and emotionalism to this overarching label.

Autoethnography comes out of the qualitative research method first used in anthropology known as ethnography. Ethnography is a framework. *Ethnos* means people, nation, and class while *graph* means to write. Ethnography is the process of writing about people. Ethnography as a method utilizes participant observation to gather data in order to write about and describe people. It is also used as a term to describe the end product of the process.

86 Ellis, The Ethnographic I, 40.
Autoethnography is quite similar to ethnography but it is also different. First, autoethnographers use the same process of ethnographic research like ethnographers where they collect their data, analyze them, and write about them using autoethnography. The process of autoethnography thereby produces autoethnography as a product just as the process of ethnography yields the product, ethnography. Second, autoethnography is similar to ethnography in that it is used not only to understand the self but also to understand others socially and culturally by looking at the self. This is done through cultural analysis and interpretation. This “self” then becomes a political tool to “look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture.”

The difference between autoethnography and ethnography is that personal experiences and stories of autoethnographers is central to the work and serves as the primary data unlike in ethnography. This autobiographical personal narrative is intentionally integrated into the research process and in the final product. It is valued instead of being devalued as it has traditionally been. However the centrality of the personal story is juxtaposed with the story of the collective society thereby following the ethnographic framework.

The qualitative research method called autoethnography was first used in 1975 by Karl Heider, an anthropologist; however it was David Hayano who is given credit for this terminology. His use of autoethnography referred to “insider” anthropologist researching their own “native” group in which they are a part of, a group that they have been admitted to, or a group with which they are familiar. Autoethnography has now transformed to include works where the researcher is the central character to stories that implicate the self.

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87 Chang, Autoethnography as Method, 49.
As a research method, autoethnography’s focus can either be broad-based that looks at the researcher’s whole life or narrowly-based that looks at certain aspects or specific moment in their lives which can either be more personal and emotional or not. Unlike ethnographers who enter their research project investigating others that are unfamiliar to them, autoethnographers enter their research familiar with their topic because they start off looking at their own selves first.

Those who have utilized autoethnographies by looking at the author’s life in its entirety include Tompkins’ *A Life in School* (1996), Ellis’ *Final Negotiations* (1995), and Nash’s *Spirituality, Ethics, Religion, and Teaching* (2002). Ellis specifically uses the term autoethnography but Tompkins and Nash do not; however both works are autoethnographic in nature even as its author’s label their work as a “scholarly personal narrative” and “academic memoir.” As a research process autoethnography can use any moment of life as a subject as long as it can be culturally analyzed and interpreted.

1. Autoethnography as a Method

I used the method of collecting autoethnographic data highlighted in Heewon Chang’s book, *Autoethnography as a Method*. First I gathered “personal memory” data such as an autobiographical timeline of my life, cultural artifacts, rituals that were prevalent in my life or vivid in my memory, and a kinship diagram. Recalling or recollecting memories is the foundation of autoethnography. It provides a social context and shows a window to the past. Because I am using my own story, I have access to my memories and I can select which ones are relevant to my research. The memories recalled will be the basis of my data and I will use these data and weave them into a story. Instead of relying on the memories of others like in ethnographic research, my

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88 Ibid., 50.
memories will be my primary data in this work. However, I have to acknowledge the
difficulty and often questionable nature of memory. Memory can be unreliable and
according to Chang, “memory selects, shapes, limits, and distorts the past.”

Nevertheless, there is a significant amount of information that can be derived from
personal memory. Thus I used various techniques to draw out and gather my personal
memories and turn it into textual data. I adapted techniques from Chang’s method of
extracting personal memory through “writing exercises of chronicling, inventoring, and
visualizing self” in order to “unravel [your] memory, write down fragments of [your]
past, and build the database for [your] cultural analysis and interpretation.”

In order to chronicle the past, I created an autobiographical timeline to record the
sequence of certain important events, experiences, and routines. This shows the
evolution of my life and journey. I also utilized inventoring in order to gather data and
also to connect, organize, and interpret the data. In order to do this, I made lists of
important events, places that are vivid or have been significant in my life, people that
have influenced or made an impact, and things that hold special value to me. I also
employed visual strategies through the use of kinship diagram or charts in order to
trouble my memories and organize them into a visual configuration. According to
Chang, “visualization activities mix the collection of your personal memory data through
self-reflection and self-introspection with cultural analysis and interpretation through
organization and explanation.” The creation of a kinship diagram will show how the

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89 Ibid., 72.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 81.
family is structured, relationships within the family, and shows the social network that I belong to.

Second I gathered “self-observational and self-reflexive data” by doing ethnographic field journals and constructing a culture gram. While personal memory data is gathering data from the past, self-observational and self-reflexive data involves the present in order to see current state of behavior, emotions, and interactions. It is similar to the method of participant observation deployed in ethnographic research. Self-observation requires gathering data in the present while self-reflection requires gathering data to show the present perspectives of the researcher. Just like the use of field journals in ethnography, I used field journals that I have recorded my personal thoughts and feelings during the research process in order to “record reflections on self and the research process.” Also I will be using the tool developed by Chang to “help people visualize their social selves” through the use of a “culture-gram.” It is a diagram that shows different types of information to see how they are connected and how they belong to specific categories. According to Chang, “By completing the chart, you will be able to see your present self from multiple perspectives, in terms of social roles you play, people groups you belong to, diversity criteria by which you judge yourself, and primary cultural identities that you give to yourself.” The culture gram will provide a rich data of my experiences, passions, and involvements.

Third I gathered external data by conducting indirect interviews to clarify and corroborate my story and by looking at photographs and videotapes of my life. Since

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93 Ibid., 96.
94 Ibid., 97.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 71–112.
the first two methods of data collection centered on the self with regards to the past and the present, the use of external data gathering brings in the social context and other perspectives into the processes by the addition of other people, artifacts, and documents as data. I conducted indirect interviews with current Filipino/Ilokano graduate students and Ilokano professors who have expertise and knowledge regarding the history of Ilokanos in Hawai‘i and in the Philippines and the experiences of Ilokanos regarding assimilation and navigating between multiple cultures. I also looked at books, newspapers, and official documents in order to historically, socially, and politically contextualize my experiences with the overall experiences of other Ilokanos. In addition I will be looking at old photographs and videotapes of my life to add visual data. Chang argues the important contribution of visual data not only to data collection itself but also the emotions it evokes when she states, “Some significant experiences are reproduced in your imagination when you review personal photographs and watch videos from your past. What are captured in images are not only persons, objects, and places, but also the invisible social context and personal memories that these images trigger.”

Autoethnography is different from other types of methods however data collection and interpretation are still important processes within autoethnography. It is not merely recollecting and telling stories as in autobiographical writing. The information gathered from the data explains how a single experience within the collective community are personally and culturally meaningful and significant. It also explains how this experience has a connection and how it is embedded within the larger community. The act of analysis and interpretation first dissects and deconstructs the data and eventually connects and weaves the data together. These processes allows the researcher to zoom in to look

97 Ibid., 109.
at specific details and how they are connected to other data while it also allows the researcher to zoom out to look at the bigger picture to see how the personal story relates to other stories in the past and the present. Chang outlines ten strategies for data analysis and interpretation: “(1) search for recurring topics, themes, and patterns; (2) look for cultural themes; (3) identify exceptional occurrences; (4) analyze inclusion and omission; (5) connect the present with the past; (6) analyze relationships between self and others; (7) compare yourself with other people’s cases; (8) contextualize broadly; (9) compare with social science constructs and ideas; and (10) frame with theories.”

This process will allow me to weave my personal story from the data gathered and culturally analyze and explain it.

2. Redefining Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a useful tool because it provides a space for those who have been historically and presently marginalized and silenced to share their stories from their own perspectives without being devalued and questioned. I draw from this tradition in my work; however I find it necessary to redefine it and reclaim it because of the nature of work that I am doing. I attempt to indigenize it to center indigenous perspectives and experiences and also to queer it in order to stretch the boundaries or maybe even break down the boundaries of autoethnography.

Although there are attempts at defining autoethnography, which have captured many different styles of writing into one overarching label, but to settle for a single and static definition hinders what autoethnography is and what it can become. It would lose its diversity and fluidity. Furthermore, it would “delineate the relationship of a self or selves (informant, narrator, I) and others/communities/cultures (they, we, society, nation, ...

98 Ibid., 131.
Subscribing to one definition would also render us subject to its rules: traditions, practices, writing styles, methodologies, and approaches.

I propose to redefine autoethnography and follow the suggestion of Tony E. Adams and Stacy Holman Jones who write:

Another way of looking at things, of approaching autoethnography, is to open up definitional boundaries. Here, autoethnography is a “broad orientation toward scholarship” and not a method, a specific set of procedures, or a mode of representation (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005, p. 298). Such opening up does not abandon intersections or interests but instead makes the politics of knowledge and experience central to what autoethnography is and does, as well as what it wants to be and become.

I also want to add that redefining autoethnography should be a constant process because it is premised on a mission of challenging and contesting hegemonic perspectives and representation. It should always be redefined and reanalyzed in order to improve and not fall prey to the very idea that it is challenging. Redefining would prevent normalization. This would allow adding on, opening up, retelling, and reconfiguring its methods and theories. The retelling of our stories that this redefinition would open up becomes important to those historically denied the right to tell their stories.

Moreover, I purport to redefine autoethnography because I do not want to merely follow a “go-to” template that already exists. Although autoethnography is broad because it encompasses research that centers the personal, I am rearticulating it instead as an avenue to have the power, space, and opportunity to speak.

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100 Ibid., 375.
3. Indigenizing Autoethnography

Through this project I also intend to indigenize the framework of autoethnography to put the indigenous perspective, experience, and voices at the heart of this autoethnography. By indigenize I am following Smith’s definition of indigenize and indigenism which “centres a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action.”

This opens up a space for Ilokano like myself to unearth our indigenous Ilokano character that has been stifled from the layers of dominance from three colonial masters, elite governing Filipinos, and our new adopted masters in our adopted land. I am also following Ward Churchill’s approach to indigenizing. As a self-proclaimed indigenist, he highlights his position:

I am one who not only takes the rights of indigenous peoples as the highest priority of my political life, but who draws upon the traditions – the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of values – evolved over many thousands of years by native peoples the world over. This is the basis upon which I not only advance critiques of, but conceptualize alternatives to the present social, political, economic, and philosophical status quo. In turn, this gives shape not only to the sorts of goals and objectives I pursue, but the kinds of strategy and tactics I advocate, the variety of struggles I tend to support, the nature of the alliances I am inclines to enter into, and so on.

While it is already subversive of autoethnography to center the subjective self as the lens and tool to analyze the collective experiences of the community/culture, it seems as if the story of the writer is more visible while the story of the collective is simply implied. By indigenizing autoethnography, I want to accentuate the story of the collective. In my narrative, I want the story of the Ilokano to be visible and on the same

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101 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 146.
level as my story. I recognize and cannot emphasize enough that I do not exist outside the stories of my people.

Moreover, I found it necessary to indigenize autoethnography because I found that it did not methodologically root itself in the indigenous ways of doing, being, and knowing. At the same time, because of this project is about decolonization and healing, indigenizing autoethnography would mean to acknowledge and recognize those that came before us and also my positionality as a settler in a new land. It is part of my protocol, my ethical responsibility, to acknowledge my position in relation to the claims of the indigenous populations here in Hawai‘i and in the United States because my presence here can be threatening to their claims and struggles for sovereignty and self-determination. However, I want to assert my understanding and solidarity with their struggles. As Martin Luther King wrote, “Injustice anywhere is threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

This means that I cannot demand justice for myself and for my own people and inaugurate my healing if I am furthering the oppression of others. True emancipation is emancipation for all. My freedom therefore is dependent on the liberation of others.

To further my methodology I will also be exploring indigenous methodologies. Western methodologies originated during the Enlightenment and Industrialization period in Europe. It is based on the hierarchy of knowledge where knowledge is owned, limited, and formalized. Western knowledge claims to be empirical where everything is

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measured, explained, and replicated.\textsuperscript{104} Indigenous knowledge systems on the other hand also have a long history as they were constructed along with Indigenous peoples history as a people and their connections with the land. Indigenous knowledge is holistic, contextual, and always evolving. As opposed to dominant Western methodologies, indigenous knowledge and methodologies are centered around the notion that knowledge is shared, earned, contextual, place-based, and relationship based. It is grounded on the connections to the people, place, and the world. Indigenous knowledge is seen as valuable and important and can be derived from stories, experiences, dreams, and ancestors.\textsuperscript{105}

My methods will include listening and reading about the standpoint of indigenous peoples in order to be informed about their experiences, their knowledges, and the problems of indigenous research so that I will not repeat them. I will also include time for deep reflection. Furthermore I will also incorporate indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies into my research methods and analysis. I also created my very own priority list based on Linda Tuhiwai-Smith’s list of priorities\textsuperscript{106} in terms of indigenous research:

1. Name our own priorities and needs as Ilokano people
2. Define and redefine my research
3. Be constantly aware of the ethical concerns of indigenous research
4. Deploy Ilokano-conscious methods
5. Extend the boundaries of dominant research methodologies

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 192.
6. Decolonization or re-education of the hegemonic research community

7. Accountability to the Ilokano people

C. Pakasaritaan as a Methodology and a Method

I will also advance these methodologies further by rooting this work in the Ilokano tradition through the methodology of pakasaritaan.107 The word pakasaritaan means history and it is rooted in the word sarita which means story. Pakasaritaan and sarita, history and story, have a symbiotic relationship where there exist a story in history and also a history in story. In the introduction titled Story, History, and Freedom: The Long Road to Justice in Kabambannuagan: Our Stories, Our Lives, Aurelio Agcaoili states, “In the Ilokano mind, sarita is the seed of pakasaritaan, with pakasaritaan (paka + sarita + an) the abstraction of the sarita, and thus, always-already invoking a certain ‘story-of-ness.’”108 My story, my sarita, therefore is a social history. The story of the person has a context. In this case, my sarita is grounded on and ultimately summons the collective Ilokano community.

Pakasaritaan, a formal methodology of inquiry in indigenous studies with a focus on the Philippines and specifically on the Ilokano people, traces its beginnings to the formalization of the dynamic of sarita/pakasaritaan.

The same formulation has been pursued by Aurelio Solver Agcaoili when he was a faculty member of Philippine Studies at the University of the Philippines with an avant-garde work about the philosophical foundations of hermeneutics and the interpretive frames involved in textual studies. His work, "Word Becoming World", 109 "Hermeneutics

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107 Aurelio S. Agcaoili and Acido, Jeffrey Tanganan, eds., Kabambannuagan: Our Stories, Our Lives (Honolulu, HI: Nakem Youth Press in collaboration with TMI Global Press, 2010).
108 Ibid., 176.
of Health and Healing",\textsuperscript{110} and "Semiotics of Sanity",\textsuperscript{111} all exemplified a variety of inquiry into what he called the Philippine condition and the textuality of that condition. He pointed to the need to recast the interpretive schemes and tools to understand that condition.

In 1996, in a number of works including a doctoral dissertation on the social, cultural, and political history of the Ilokanos, a history that essentially implicates the history of the Philippine nation state, "Bannuar, The Funeral of the Suns: An Inquiry on the Philosophy of Life of the Ilokanos",\textsuperscript{112} Agcaoili formalized the pakasaritaan methodology and set the terrain for a version of how to theorize a research methodology that is at the service of the Ilokano people. He also highlighted the ethical need to produce knowledge that reflects the need to unlearn and re-learn Western epistemology.

Drawing from sarita/sarsarita, a primeval part of the Ilokano tradition of story-telling and story-making that become ingredients for social history, Agcaoili pushes the limits of story/narrative and articulates a vision about the need to trust what stories are and what they can do to approach the issues of language, memory, community, and truth. Narrative, according to him, is thus a way of exploration, never a means to arriving at something fixed and permanent, but a means to revisiting the tentative nature of language, truth, meaning, and knowledge. In this dissertation, he sets the context of what the pakasaritaan method and methodology is, and how it is translated into an action plan for doing research.

\textsuperscript{112} Aurelio S. Agcaoili, "Bannuar, The Funeral of the Suns: An Inquiry on the Philosophy of Life of the Ilokanos" (University of the Philippines College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, n.d.).
The end-result in the Agcaoili model is a social, historical, narrative accounting of the long duration of the history of struggle, conflict, uprising, and revolution of the peoples of the Philippines, Ilokanos included, with their contribution to several huge uprisings and widespread struggle of national importance, such as the Basi Revolt, the Candon Republic, and the Diego Silang-Gabriela Silang uprising.

Beginning from these inchoate forms of struggle, Agcaoili looks into the contemporary texts and brings in contradictions from the very narratives of the Ilokano people, with on the left the contribution of Jose Maria Sison to leftist and thus, socialist, nationalist aspirations, and with on the right the contribution of Ferdinand Marcos to the reproduction of the same unjust and undemocratic social infrastructures that have provided the impetus for a continuing form of widespread social injustice in the Philippines. His novel, Dangadang ("War"),\(^\text{113}\) elaborates this approach through a reworking into a novelistic form the very issues he raised in how to rework sarita/pakasaritaan as a theory and practice in the production of a long narrative.

Other works, such as anthologies on the literary history of the Ilokano people of Hawaii (Rekuerdo/Memento\(^\text{114}\)) and on the Ilokanos of North America (Kallautang\(^\text{115}\)), a theoretical treatise on indigenous knowledge (Nakem: Essays on Amianan Knowledge\(^\text{116}\)), on the sarita/pakasaritaan of the young people of Hawaii (Kabambannuagan: Our Voices, Our Lives\(^\text{117}\)) and sarita/pakasaritaan in the voices of the

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\(^{113}\) Aurelio S. Agcaoili, *Dangadang* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2003).


\(^{115}\) Kallautang.

\(^{116}\) *Nakem Essays on Amianan Knowledge* (Honolulu, Hawai‘i: Ilokano Language and Literature Program, University of Hawai‘i at Manoa with the assistance of Student Equity, Excellence and Diversity of the University of Hawai‘i, n.d.).

\(^{117}\) Agcaoili and Acido, Jeffrey Tangonan, *Kabambannuagan: Our Stories, Our Lives*. 
old people of Hawaii (Panagtaripato: Parenting Our Stories, Our Stories as Parents\textsuperscript{118}) all point to the same framework of doing research and of producing knowledge by a conscious rejection of the colonial approach to interpretation by resorting to the internal power of texts as these fall into a conversation with their own contexts.

In 2012, Julius Soria, in his PhD study of the Ilokano heritage learners of Kalihi for his dissertation titled Paka(sarita)an: On Ilokano Language, Identity, and Heritage Education, used the very framework and methodology of sarita/pakasaritaan in accounting the implicated stories of Ilokano heritage learning in Hawai‘i. This is the first of its kind in Hawaii, and never has there been any attempt to understand why it is ethically right to problematize the issues of public education, immigrant experience, diaspora, and heritage learning. By going back to the stories of five informants, and drawing from these stories the tropes of a variety of domains identified by the research, he established the validity and usefulness, even productivity, of this sort of theory and method.

In all these works, we have two forms of knowledge production, or aspects of the same vision: resistance and insistence. Agcaoili has articulated these as the tactical power a researcher needs to come to terms with an otherwise foreign material: the need to resist the onslaught of the same knowledge propped up by the academia and the instruments of that academia, research included, and the insistence on the need to listen once again to the voice of the people, to the power of their word, and to the redemptive in their recollection, articulation, and expression of what they have come to witness.

As a method, I utilized pakasaritaan every week throughout the writing of this thesis. There were other Ilokano scholars/visionaries who were working on their Master’s thesis just like me. All four of us created a group and utilized pakasaritaan as a method in our projects. We were all from different departments but our projects were similar in that we had similar goals of uplifting, inspiring, and bringing to the surface the voices and priorities of Ilokano/Filipino people. We created our own space where we met every Friday and shared food. We began by giving atang, offering of food, to our ancestors and indigenous spirits and gods followed by a prayer asking for strength, guidance, and space in our work and our journey. One by one we shared our projects, stories, visions, obstacles, and goals. We were each other’s motivators, critics, and teachers. We were each other’s community. It was a reciprocal relationship. We had ethical concerns about the consequences and impacts of our work in regards to the Ilokano/Filipino community. As a member of this community and because we were writing about them, we were accountable to the overall community. As a result, we shared our stories to each other and provided feedback and criticism. Through stories we were able to shape our research, collaborate, and keep our priorities and promises to the community.

Each meeting I also shared some of the stories in my project, this also fueled each of them to share similar experiences that they had in the Philippines and in Hawai‘i. Things that I had forgotten were illuminated by their memories and recollections. I also experienced some of their experiences and they also experienced some of what I have experienced. Hence in one way, I was writing, remembering, conceptualizing, and analyzing not just my story but also theirs.
Prologue

These are the layers and layers of my colonization. What would happen if I peeled all these layers away? What would be the story that I uncover? Each story is a story of the different ways that I have been colonized. As I tell each story, I am exposing the story of my colonialism and as I am doing this, I am attempting to decolonize myself and my story.

By remembering and retelling my story, I am exposing the violence that was done to us as a people and to our stories. Our stories have been violently taken from us and suppressed. As a result we have forgotten to tell our own stories. Instead we have become storytellers of other people’s stories because alien languages, cultures, and stories have been superimposed upon us. We have been violently made to forget. Through the very act of retelling and remembering, we can reclaim our history, our stories, and ourselves and ultimately to restore our spirit.
Chapter 2

*Panagparamut/Taking Root*

As an Ilokano, an Ilokano woman, and as an Ilokano woman immigrant in Hawai‘i, I am caught in between two worlds. I am neither here nor there. Where are my roots? Is it in the Philippines or is it here? Where is my home? Is it the Philippines or is it here? Is it possible to claim that the Philippines is my home and where my roots are planted when this Philippines is of a time that has passed and it is the Philippines that I have left behind and forgotten? Is it possible to go back? In some ways we can no longer go back because that time and space is no longer there, it has passed, and it is no longer accessible. However, in another way we can go back. Going back in this way means remembering and understanding where we have come from, who came before us, where we have planted our roots, where we have ended up, and the changes that we have undergone.

My attempt at remembering is an act of rooting. I root myself in my story and the story of my people. I am trying to find a home in my story and the bigger dynamic story of the collective. The telling of this story is naming the pain, unearthing wounded memories, and recognizing my tenuous identity as someone navigating two worlds. My identity is not fixed, instead it is fluid and impermanent.

When the Ilokano epic hero, Lam-ang, to whom we look to for clues about our origins as Ilokano people, came out of the womb, he named himself. It was he who chose his own name and named his being. He did not need anyone to give him a name.

This creation myth points to the Ilokano tradition of naming our land, our home, and ourselves. This naming sheds light on how we can understand our origins: our
histories, our language, our culture, our relationship to the land, and our relationship to each other and to the overall communities. As Ilokanos, we named ourselves just like Lam-ang did. Unlike certain discourses that claim that Ilokanos did not exist, were not a community, or did not identify ourselves as Ilokano, Ilokanos knew since even before the arrival of the colonizers that we were Ilokano. We defined and understood ourselves through our relationship, origins, and connection to the land that nurtured us. The land highlights and symbolizes our ancestral roots, our home, and our origins. Even now this is how we identify ourselves.

Ilokanos named the place they lived or originated from Ilokandia, which are now the current provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Abra, and La Union. They called themselves Ilokano from the prefix *i*- from, and the root word *loko*, lowland. *Loko* is the root word of *lukong*, the lowest point of the topography of the land. It was used to describe the land from where Ilokanos came from. It was used to describe the narrow strip of land between the Cordillera Mountain Range and the South China Sea, which was home to Ilokanos. Ilokanos however were not confined to the Ilocos region. Ilokanos were a traveling and migratory people always in search of a better life. As a result, Ilokanos moved south and west inhabiting most of northern Luzon, eastern Luzon in Palawan, and even Mindanao, the biggest southern island in the Philippine archipelago.

There are several stories that narrate where the Ilokanos came from and there are different versions of these creation stories of the Ilokanos. Ilokanos are a diversified group coming from different places and speaking different variations of Ilokano. We also have many different belief systems that are a combination of polytheism and animism. At the same time, we are a migratory people. Hence there are many different versions of
the genealogy of the Ilokanos. This tells us that the Ilokanos are a thinking people. As their circumstances changed, the stories changed as well. These changes mean that they owned their stories and adapted it to their circumstances.

By looking at the Ilokano epic story, Life of Lam-ang, *Biag ni Lam-ang*, even with its many variations and colonial corruptions, it contains the evidence of our assertion of self-identity and our connection with another group of people, the Igorots (*-i, from, -gorot/golod, mountain*), the people of the uplands. It showcases the interconnectedness of these two groups of people who shared a relationship with each other through trade and industry and whose lives were connected through knowledge, rituals, stories, language, and the earth.

The Life of Lam-ang also alludes to the origins of the Ilokano people and how Ilokanos understood each other, their environment, and their relationship with other people. By looking back and learning from our stories, we are ultimately rooting our knowledge and understanding with our ancestors and the land, which we originated from. We begin with the land and our ancestors in order to acknowledge that which has sustained us and those who have come before us. Likewise the act of looking back at our roots, our origins, is an act of resistance. It is a resistance against the naming by the colonizer. After generations and generations of not letting us speak, it is now our chance to set ourselves free by reclaiming back our voices, stories, and histories.

The roots of the Ilokano people are in the land where they have made their home, in their stories that they have inherited from their ancestors and adapted to their circumstances, in their dynamic and always changing language and culture as they move from place to place looking for a better life, in their minds, in their memories, in their
relationships with each other, and their histories. Just like a tree spreading its roots into a specific place, it is ultimately making a home by rooting itself and establishing a connection with the land and its surroundings. Similarly, when a person takes root, s/he is making a home. The birthland, sometimes called the homeland, is where a person initially establishes her/his roots.

I first planted my roots in Pasaleng. It was where I was born. Barangay Pasaleng is in the municipality of Pagudpud in the province of Ilocos Norte, Philippines. Pasaleng is the northernmost barangay, village or barrio, of Pagudpud, which is also the northernmost municipality of the province of Ilocos Norte. Ilocos Norte is cradled between the Cordillera Mountains, a mountain range that ran vertically down the middle of Luzon, the northern and biggest island of the Philippines, and the South China Sea. It is home to the third largest ethno-linguistic group in the Philippines: the Ilokanos.

What I remember of my childhood are vivid memories of play, family, and the outdoors. I hardly stayed home. It was not the time of video games, television, or isolation. In fact, it was a time when we did not have toys to play with. Instead, we had each other and our imagination. It was also a time when no tall cemented fences segregated houses or lots from each other; instead, we could go from one house to the next and gathering our friends to go out and play.

What I do not remember or have forgotten about my childhood is the violence. I was born during a turbulent period in Philippine history, a few months after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino, leader of the opposition against the Marcos regime, on the tarmac of then Manila International Airport as he exited the plane on August 21, 1983. At this time, the Marcos regime had been in power since 1965 when Ferdinand
Marcos was first elected into the presidency. His long and extended rule over the Philippines was a result of winning a second term in office (1969-1981) through fraud, coercion, and violence; declaring Martial Law on September 22, 1972 by exaggerating the threat of the Communist New People’s Army and Muslim revolutionaries (Moro National Liberation Front) in Mindanao that lasted until January 17, 1981; and winning a third term in office because many of his opponents boycotted the election in protest. The United States government especially by US President Ronald Reagan and previous presidents endorsed him. They supported him even during his declaration of Martial Law and the years following. They financed his regime by giving approximately $2.5 million in economic and military aid and another $5.5 billion from institutions like the World Bank.

During his regime he changed the constitution; suspended the writ of habeas corpus to those that opposed him especially the New People’s Army (NPA) members and Muslims in Mindanao; confiscated corporations, land, and business and gave it to his friends, family, and loyal supporters such as military officials; dissolved the Philippine Congress; suppressed the freedom of speech and free press; installed the state press as the only legitimate press; expanded the Philippine armed forces to approximately 300,000; ordered the arrest, killing, and intimidation of his rivals and opponents; deployed mandatory brainwashing of the youth under the direction of his daughter, Imee Marcos; and stole an estimated $5 billion alone from the Philippine treasury.

120 Ibid., 138–139.
Since Marcos’ second term victory through fraud, vote buying, and the embezzlement of $56 million from the Philippine treasury to use for his campaign, he began acquiring popular opposition. It began with students who were later joined by the Communist New People’s Army and laborers to protest Marcos’ dictatorship and attachment with the American Empire, corruption, fraud, illegal practices, and dissatisfaction with the decline of the economy.

In the early part of the 80s, the Marcos regime was coming to an end. Marcos’ health was deteriorating; he was losing control as corruption escalated perpetrated by his supporters that he placed in power, and he was facing severe opposition. The assassination of Ninoy Aquino in August of 1983 sparked the outrage of the masses. It launched massive protests. There was political and civil unrest. Many people were dissatisfied with the Marcos regime. Two years after the assassination, a resolution was passed to impeach Marcos. Many of his supporters soon started to withdraw. President Ronald Reagan, close friend and ally of Marcos, and his administration who unwaveringly supported him throughout his regime began to distance themselves from him.

Public discontent led to a whole movement that began as a series of public demonstrations using non-violent resistance. This movement would eventually culminate into the February 1986 People Power Revolution that deposed Ferdinand Marcos, installed Corazon Aquino, Ninoy Aquino’s wife, as President of the Philippines, and restored democracy.

It was during this time of the decline of the Marcos regime, a growing discontent by the masses, and increased uprising that greeted me into this world. Even in the Ilocos
where Marcos originated from and where he found the strongest support by fellow Ilokanos, he was criticized and opposed for his brutality and corruption.

I was very young then but I remember being woken up in the middle of the night by neighbors alerting us of the New People’s Army (NPA) marching through my barangay, Pasaleng, armed with Armalite rifles looking for Marcos supporters. The NPA is the right arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which has its origins from the Japanese Empire’s conquest of the Philippines. They fought and revolted using guerilla warfare against the Japanese and also the Americans during United States control of the Philippines; however they eventually surrendered to the Philippine government in 1954. During the Marcos regime the NPA remobilized and expanded all over the Philippines as more and more Filipinos joined the resistance to oppose Marcos.

The NPA primarily lived or took refuge in the mountains or the outskirts of town. I never saw them kill or hurt anyone but they always instilled fear among the masses. They looked intimidating. The NPA were mostly men dressed in camouflage pants and jackets and they always carried their Armalite rifles with them. We sometimes saw them in the center of the barangay drinking or buying alcohol. As kids, we were always told not to talk to them, look them in the eye, or go near them. We were all supposed to act normal, pretend they are not there, and quickly leave.

The NPA came to our house twice. The first time was in the middle of the night. My parents and I had already gone to bed and were fast asleep. We were immediately awoken by our neighbor who lived a few houses up the road. She came knocking on the front door calling my father’s name.

“Umaydan…umaydan,” she said.
“Asinno?” replied my father.

“Asda dagita NPA. Addada paylang idiy rangtay ngem agpakastoyda. Dandani dan,” she said as she ran back to her house.

[“They’re here…they’re here,” she said.]

[“Who?” replied my father.]

[“The NPA are here. They are still by the bridge but they are coming this way. They are almost here,” she said as she ran back to her house.]

My father immediately yelled a series of instructions to my mother. She took me out of bed, out of their room, and into the second bedroom. She ushered me under the bed and crawled under as well. My father instructed us not to make any noise or movements just in case they come into the house. He shut off all the lights and I heard my father closing all the jalousie windows and barring down the two back doors and the two in the front. He came back to the room and sat on the floor next to us as we waited.

After some time there came a knock on the front door. We all held out breath and waited. They continued knocking and one of them said, “Adda kayo apo?” [Is anyone here?] My father looked at my mother and me and stood up. I heard him open the door.


[“Oh..I have just woken up. How are you? Come in. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?”]

I heard them move to the living room. They had heavy footsteps from the combat boots that they wore. There was also a distinct sound of metal touching the tile floor, which I guessed was the sound of their rifles as they laid them on the tile floor. My father offered
them *merienda*\textsuperscript{123} as was customary when we received visitors. Eventually all I could hear were bits and pieces of the conversation, some pleasantries, and uneasy laughter.

After a few hours, I must have fallen asleep because I only remembered being woken up by my mother as she put me back on the bed.

There was another time they came in the house. It was not as scary because it was during the day. From the kitchen I saw them with my father. I did not move any closer. I stayed in the kitchen. My mother and father explained these occurrences to me that the NPA were “*agsisiim,*” or sniffing around. They were looking for Marcos supporters or his cronies.

While I did not physically witness or hear of any beating or killing of anyone in our barangay by the hands of the NPA, I experienced first hand their tactics of intimidation. It occurred while I was with my mother at her workplace. My mother was teaching sixth grade in the neighboring barangay, Pancian. I was still very young so she would bring me to school with her. On this particular day, she was in the middle of teaching her students and I was sitting on her desk just watching. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a bunch of students running past the classroom. I looked outside and I saw everyone running out to the front of the school. They were looking out into the main road. Several of my mother’s students asked the other kids what was going on. They found out that there was a big semi-truck on fire in the middle of the road. They said it was committed by the NPA who were seen next to the truck only moments before. They said that the NPA were still hanging out in front of a store just in front of the school. Everyone was panicking. They feared that the NPA were going to come inside the school and create havoc. Many of the students fled to all directions. My mother’s friend and co-

\textsuperscript{123} Merienda is an in-between meal snack typically eaten in the midafternoon.
teacher came to get us. We fled to the back of the school into the rice paddies. We kept walking towards the mountains along many more rice paddies until we could see that we had put some distance between the school and us. After some time, we turned left and walked towards a small road that eventually meets up with the main road. After that incident, the rumors circulating around that event pointed the NPA as the transgressors but it was never confirmed.

The NPA were not the only forces that kept the masses under constant fear of violence and intimidation. The police also conducted their own manhunts and employed similar tactics. They too questioned people and investigated areas while leaving behind the threat of violence to those that they thought were helping Marcos’ opponents. At that time we heard rumors of the police looking the other way as Marcos’ cronies and their personal bodyguards did whatever they wanted. They stole a lot of land from many families and killed anyone who opposed them.

My brother, Isagani “Sonny” Ortega, was a police officer during this era. He had not been a police officer for that long. He was young and daring. One day when I was in the second grade, his unit was investigating a location that was rumored to be the dwelling of several NPA members. They were on a reconnaissance mission at first; however when they were ordered to attack, my brother was the first in the house. He was shot and killed.

The day that the Philippine National Police brought his body back to Pasaleng, my mother came to Laoag City where I was going to school to take me back home. The moment I stepped out of the bus, I noticed the atong, a huge burning log of wood placed in front of the gate by the road to indicate that a mansayag, wake, is being held and that
someone from that house died. The atong is kept burning throughout the duration of the
wake and it is believed that it will keep evil spirits away and facilitate the ascent of the
soul to the next world.

As I walked the path to the house, I was overwhelmed by the amount of people
that were there. Cars, tricycles, and motorcycles littered the front yard and along the side
of the house. My mother ushered me into the house through the kitchen door. The living
room was packed and I watched from the far end of the living room as my sisters with
their black veil and other relatives dressed in all black surrounded the coffin erupted into
tears and chanted their dung-aw, lamentation or dirge. The dung-aw is an Ilokano
tradition that is either impromptu, passed down through generations as a standard text
song, or a combination of the two. It usually consists of words of advice, pain, prayer,
and heartache through wailing over and in front of the corpse.

For the next couple of weeks, the scene at the house remained the same.
Members of the community, relatives from out of town, friends of the family visited,
helped, and stayed with my family. It was a community grief and collective struggle.
The death of my brother affected the whole community and they were all there not only
to pay their respects but also to lend a hand. Everyone participated in the nightly prayers
led by the elders, many took turns staying up all night and day watching the body as
directed by Ilokano tradition, certain people were in charge of cooking for everyone, and
others were in charge of other arrangements.

On the day of the funeral, all of us marched behind the hearse down the national
highway to the church for the funeral service. It culminated in a march back on the road
to the graveyard at the edge of the town. Another service was conducted by the priest
followed by a eulogy from my father and a twenty-four-gun salute by the Philippine National Police. As they placed the coffin in the burial chamber, the elders chanted the dung-aw. I watched my sisters wailing and weeping while hugging my deceased brother’s now orphaned daughters. Both daughters and their baby sister who was with her mother in California were now without a father.

The Ortega family and the community lost a member that day. As much as we feared the NPA, they never dared to come near the town or the house for many months after. It was rumored that they were scared of retaliation from the Ortega family.

This is one of the stories that I have forgotten. Perhaps I have been made to forget the violence: the violence done to my family and the violence done to the people. I remember the tragedy of my brother being killed by the NPA but I have forgotten the deeper story, the context, and the meaning of this story. My brother’s death was not an isolated event. There were many like him sacrificed for the bigger cause of the nation, security, etc. He was merely a pawn by those who were pushing their ideologies against each other. Whether colonialist, nationalist, or socialist they all used the Philippines as their battleground. They all fought for power, pushing their own agenda but at what cost? They sacrificed their own people, communities, and family members.

All of these different factions, their conflicts, and their agendas are all related to the history of colonialism of the Philippines. Nationalism grew out as a response to colonialism and socialism grew out as a response to both. However, all three were nonetheless pushing their own agenda. They did not want liberation for all, instead they just wanted to replace one system for another system, their own. Consequently, who bore
the brunt of the violence, the deaths, the sacrifices, or the damages? It was the masses, the poor, and the oppressed.

Remembering stories whether they are traumatic or happy means confronting the past. Given that I am remembering these stories in the present, I am also analyzing these stories by the lens of the present. It has dawned on me that I never realized how much of my life was impacted or guided by the history of colonialism of the Philippines. I also did not realize how much of my life was also impacted by the colonialism of Hawai‘i. As I was trying grow my own roots here, trying to make a home, I was also wounded by its own story of being occupied, its own narrative being usurped by an even bigger storyteller which is the United States. It is the same story all over again. The story of Hawai‘i is the same story as the Philippines. How can I take root in a land that has the same blood and the same tears? How can I take root in a land that is pained as the land that I have left behind?

By telling my story, our stories, I am ultimately making a social historical narrative. Two stories are running in parallel together: my story and the social history/social story. As I tell these stories, I am naming my/our pain. I am the new Lam-ang in a new form. It is enacting one’s own name. For Lam-ang, it was to name himself. For me, it is to name my pain. We can no longer stand by while others write our stories for us, we must write our own.
Chapter 3

_Pannakaguduagudua/Split/Broken/Fragmented_

If it can be assumed that I was once whole or at least less affected by certain hegemonic forces that have made me forget, how and when did I become fragmented? When and how did my trauma begin? What was I made to forget and what was I told to remember?

When I was five years old, my mother and I took a trip to Laoag City, the capital of Ilocos Norte. I thought it was just another regular weekend visit to see my grandmother, my mother’s mother, who lived in the city. However my mother informed me that I had reached that age where I needed to start my formal schooling. My parents have decided that I was to attend school at Holy Spirit Academy of Laoag.

Holy Spirit Academy was located along the edge of the Padsan River and adjacent to the Saint Williams Cathedral of Laoag City, the center of Catholic faith in the city. Saint Williams Cathedral was the beacon of Catholicism where everyone flocked to daily to practice his or her faith. It represents Spain’s deeply entrenched colonial and Catholic legacy in the Philippines. The Augustinian friars who first established a ministry in Laoag in 1586 built the cathedral in 1612.

The establishment of Holy Spirit Academy in conjunction with Saint Williams Cathedral was to disseminate and indoctrinate Catholic faith and morality early on to the children of Ilocos. This was a time when Catholic education was a symbol of wealth, privilege, and access. Access to the school however was reserved for the rich and middle class members of Ilocos. Entrance meant that the child passed the interview for admittance and the parents had enough money for the costly tuition, uniform, books, and

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other miscellaneous requirements. It was a very exclusive all-girls Catholic school where the daughters of the rich and political elites were educated by Catholic nuns and female teachers.

The weekend before I started kindergarten at Holy Spirit, I protested and cried to my mother because I did not want to stay in Laoag and go to school. My home was not only located in Pasaleng, Pasaleng was my home. I did not want to leave it. I did not want to leave my childhood. I did not want to leave the familiar. I did not want to leave my nieces, nephews, and friends who were my constant companions and sources of joy and happiness. And even worse, I had to leave my parents. They were to remain in Pasaleng because of work. In Laoag, I would only have my grandmother.

No matter how long I protested, my mother would not budge. I asked her why I could not attend Pasaleng Elementary School like the other kids in Pasaleng. I asked her why did I have to leave Pasaleng, why Holy Spirit Academy, and why in Laoag. Her answers always remained the same. It was always “it's for your own good,” “it's for you to have a better future,” “you will have a better education,” “you might be peer-pressured by bad kids in Pasaleng,” or “don't you want to be a doctor or lawyer and be successful?”

Throughout the school year, I stayed in Laoag City with my grandmother in a small house nestled behind the wall next to the stadium of Mariano Marcos State University of Laoag. My grandmother patiently took care of me from morning to night every day. Every day began and ended the same. She would wake me up at six o’clock every morning, yell at me to get out of bed, and force me to go take a bath that she had already prepared by heating up water and mixing it with the cold well water. While I sat
there in the bathroom staring at the bucket of water fearing the incoming cold, I would hear her yelling at me from outside as she fed the pigs to hurry or else I would be late for school. By the time I got up the courage to finally take a bath, the water would be cold, and I would be screaming and shaking from the cold water. It would already be past six thirty by the time I finished with my bath. Once finished, my grandmother would thrust my newly pressed pale brown and white uniform on my hands and yelled at me to rush, brush my teeth, and eat the breakfast she already set on the table. It would be six forty-five by the time we got out of the house and my grandma and I would have to run across the stadium to catch a tricycle barely making it on time when the bell rang at seven o’clock to signal the start of the school day. Hair wet and freezing, I would join the appropriate line grouped by class and section in front of the flagpole to begin the singing of the Philippine National Anthem. On certain days that I arrived late the guard would temporarily lock the gate to prevent all the latecomers like me entrance into the school during the morning procession. We would all be handed little sheets of paper to fill out to write our excuses for being late while in the background we would hear the national anthem being sung from inside the school.

The school day would commence following the march back to the classroom. We remained in one classroom all day with different teachers coming in to teach different subjects. When the teacher came in the class, we were required to stand up and greet the teacher, “Good Morning/Afternoon Mrs. Magdirila” or “Good Morning/Afternoon Sister Agnes.” After that she would lead us in prayer. Palms together with our heads bowed and eyes closed, we recited either the Lord’s Prayer and/or the Hail Mary in English.
Every grade was subdivided into two sections with around sixty students per classroom to one teacher. We had about seven different subjects per day, which included Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, English, Tagalog, Religion (Catholic only), and Home Economics.

My colonial education in the Philippines reeked of the remnants of Spanish and U.S. colonialism and the nationalist project. Spanish colonial education under the Spanish Missionaries was terminated after the end of almost 400 years of Spanish colonialism. It was followed briefly by education established under the independent Republic of the Philippines. However, the subsequent conquest and domination of the Philippines by the United States however ushered in an era of American colonial education that was enacted under Act No. 74 Education Act of 1901. This Act established the Department of Public Instruction, the creation of a secular public school, and the establishment of English as the “basis of all public school instruction.”

This secular public school system was erected during the first decade of American rule which was structured around American exceptionalism, American culture, and the English language in order to instill the ideology of white supremacy and racial hegemony that legitimized the status of Filipinos as colonial subjects who must be educated and enlightened out of their “backward” and “primitive” state in order to join the modern world under the supervision and guidance of their U.S. colonial master. The complex and racist hegemony of U.S. colonialism of the Philippines created an American educational system that submerged the Filipino colonial subject to American customs and culture through the dispersion of U.S. literature, film, music, material goods, fashion,

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dances, and many more while at the same time suppressing Filipino cultures and customs.

The English language was also made compulsory within the school curriculum. Renato Constantino in *The Mis-education of the Filipino* argues about the effectiveness of this colonial policy when he writes:

> The first and perhaps the master stroke in the plan to use education as an instrument of colonial policy was the decision to use English as the medium of instruction. English became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen…. With American textbooks, Filipinos started learning not only a new language but also a new way of life, alien to their traditions and yet a caricature of their model. This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their mis-education, for they learned no longer as Filipino but as colonials. They had to be disoriented from their nationalist goals because they had to become good colonials.  

After the end of the United States’ direct control of the Philippines, control was bestowed to Filipino elites who collaborated with and were placed in power by U.S. government and colonial officials. They perpetuated the current system but incorporated their own agenda in order to keep themselves in power. They hid behind the façade of opposing American Imperialism and working for the Filipinos. This nationalist project was in fact just as oppressive and homogenizing.

The colonial education I received growing up in the Philippines is a combination of Catholic religion and values incorporated into the American educational system that has been appropriated by and integrated with the monolithic nationalist agenda. It was conservative, ritualistic, patriarchal, and rigid as I was taught and trained to become a good proper Catholic girl. I was taught to be obedient, faithful, and virtuous. At the

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same time I was taught to join the modern capitalist world just like our country was trying to do. We studied and emulated the Western world by adapting the same educational system so that we could be trained into that system and compete in the ever-expanding global world. Not only did we adopt their system but we also trained ourselves to think like them and be like them. On top of that we were educated to be like that so that our people and our country could join in the system, participate, and play the game.

The first layer of my education is the indoctrination of Catholicism. Holy Spirit Academy was a Catholic school. It was very strict and very religious. In Religion class, a nun taught us about the Catholic faith. It was a mandatory class that we needed to take every year. We learned all the prayers, read the Bible, learned how to pray the Rosary, and learned Catholic values and how to apply them from our Religion textbooks. We were expected to follow and perform the seven Sacraments throughout the course of our lives. We had to be baptized if we were not (Baptism) and our parents had to be wed by the Church if they had not (Matrimony). We had to undergo training for Confirmation in order to receive the Eucharist. We were required to attend mass every Sunday dressed in our all white school uniforms with white socks and black mary-janes. We also had regular penitence (Confession) throughout the year when one of the priests from Saint Williams came to the school. We had to stand in line, report all the sins we had committed since our last repentance, and prayed.

The second layer of my education is the dominance of Euro-American knowledge, culture, and language in the curriculum. I remember memorizing the parts of a flower/plant in Science class, reciting the multiplication table, and doing long division
on the chalkboard in front of the whole Math class. We had to recite American poems and study the history of the United States. We had to learn how to speak English from the moment we learned how to recite the English alphabet in kindergarten. As early as kindergarten we learned that “A” was for apple, “E” was for elephant, and “R” was for rabbit. Many of these things we had never seen personally in our whole lives and yet that was how we were taught to remember the letters of the alphabet.

The third layer of my colonial education is the addition of the Filipino nationalist education. Just like the English language, we were also formally taught Tagalog, the appointed national language of the Philippines dubbed domestically as *Filipino*. While we learned English, we also simultaneously learned Tagalog. We had to speak English in English class and therefore we had to speak Tagalog in Filipino class. While we learned about our colonizer’s histories, we also learned about Filipino history. This nationalist narrative went something like this: we were oppressed under Spain, we rose up and fought, the Americans came, then we were brutally subjugated by the cruel Japanese, and in the end we were saved by the Americans who bestowed upon us democracy, modernity, civilization, and eventual independence. However, we were eventually allowed the right to govern ourselves and now we are trying to join the industrial world. The dominant narrative of Filipino history is the story of the center of power. We learned about Manila, Philippine presidents, and prominent elites. Many of the so-called “Filipino heroes” who are romanticized in the history books were Tagalog elites. We are all Filipinos, the textbooks said. We are one race, one history, one language, it adds. The various ethno-linguistic groups and indigenous peoples of the Philippines were barely if
not mentioned. And yet we never had to learn their languages nor did we have to learn about their histories and cultures.

My education consisted of all these layers. Overwhelming layers. Layers that crushed me. In my Ilocos world, with my Ilokano tongue, and my Ilokano body, I learned about others. I learned English and Tagalog not Ilokano. I learned of foreign places that I had never seen but not Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Cagayan, or La Union. I saw pictures of Spanish, Japanese, American, and Tagalog people but not Ilokanos. There were no Ilokano stories.

These layers were placed upon me, but I accepted them. Holy Spirit Academy came with a certain distinction and stature. I received “oohs” and “aahs” whenever other people found out where I went to school. I was friends with the daughters of business owners in Laoag City therefore I found recognition and acknowledgement when I shopped at their stores. I was invited and received in their homes. I was close to those in power. Everyday I saw the governor of Ilocos Norte, Rodolfo Fariñas drop off his two daughters to school along with his wife whose face he scarred when he shoved a scalding iron to her face. While I was included in the culture of power, Holy Spirit Academy promised more than that. I was promised a future: a future that almost guaranteed acceptance into the elite universities in Manila.

The school day ended at four in the afternoon. My grandma would be there waiting for me outside the gate. From there I would accompany her. On many occasions I went with her to various homes in the neighborhood that were holding the wake of their dead. I would wait outside as she and other female elders of the community led the lualo, prayer, and the dung-aw, dirge. I would also go with her to Euselia’s Store and Gloria’s
store where she helped out by cooking and cleaning. I watched her cook *pancit, lumpia,* and other dishes. From there we would walk home. I would follow and watch my grandmother around as she prepared and cooked dishes. I learned a lot from her even if I did not realize it at the time. I used to see her set aside or place the *atang,* food offering, on the altar during All Soul’s Day, a celebration, or a deceased relative’s birthday or death anniversary. She said it was to remember and pay our respects to our deceased relatives and ancestors. She also taught me how to cook: when to put the vegetables in at the right time or when to add seasonings to the food. At a very young age, she called on me to help her kill and cook a chicken. She showed me the proper way to kill it, how to use hot water to take the feathers out, how to pluck the feathers, how to cut it into different cuts, and also showed me the different parts of a chicken. She also showed me indigenous ways of healing mostly because I was a very sickly child with asthma. When I had a fever she would put vinegar on my temples or add vinegar to a warm bath to gather the head from my body. If I was feeling nauseous, vomiting, or feverish, she said it might be the ancestors so she would gather the branches of the marunggay (*moringa oleifera*) tree and brush it all over my body. She then would pray, “Apo haan yo kuma sagsagiden. Umadayu kayo ta haan kayo kapadpad. Kaasianyo kadi apo ta haan yo kadi parparigaten, pagsaksakiten, wenno pagibibturen.”

[God please do not harm her. Please leave because you belong to another world. Please have pity on her and do not let her be in pain, make her sick, or suffer.]

Outside of school and my westernized/nationalized education, the world that I faced was Ilokano. Living these two separate contradictory worlds brought about an internal struggle within me. Most of the time my Ilokano self lost. I would fight with my
grandmother because I did not want to eat some of the dishes that she cooked because I wanted to eat hotdogs, cake, chips, and spaghetti. I would beg to go watch movies like Jurassic Park. I would throw tantrums so that my mother would buy me a Barbie doll.

My school years in Laoag more and more brought exposure to the cultures of Manila and the U.S.

For most of my grade school years in the Philippines, my mother would come to Laoag for the weekend to stay with me or she would come get me on Fridays and take me back to Pasaleng for the weekend. Pasaleng was where I stayed for holidays, summer vacation, and most weekends. It was my home. From the crowd, heat, and dust of Laoag City it took three hours by bus on my way home to Pasaleng because the National Highway was not completely cemented yet. It took over an hour to travel the rocky pot-holed dirt road. Once the bus turns into Barangay Balaoi and unto the cemented road; however the scene changes. The view of the immensely dark blue water of the South China Sea, the numbing coolness of the air against my face, and the smell of the ocean engulfing the senses always signaled that I have arrived home. It eternally brought a sense of comfort and relief to see and to be back home.
Chapter 4

_Pannakaparut/Uprootedness_

What does being uprooted really mean? When a person is uprooted, it can be assumed or approximated that one has already planted her roots, established a home, and formed relationships. However, what happens when one plants her roots in one place, makes a home there, and then has to tear these roots up and sever those already established connections? What happens to the ties one has made previously to the land, the people, and the community? What is life like in this foreign land? What are the realities of life? Is it as it was imagined? Did fantasy become reality or a nightmare? Can this new place with its own wounded history and reality be a place to spread one’s severed roots? Can this new place be home? Can one have more than one home?

The uprooting of Filipinos from the Philippines may seem like a personal choice made by those searching for a better life; however there is an underlying historical reason as to why Filipinos have scattered across the world. They leave because of colonialism. They leave because Spain and the United States have raped and pillaged their land, their people, and their economy. They leave because the country is poor and unable to take care of its own people. They leave because so many of the country’s people live in destitution. They leave because they need to survive. They leave because other countries like the U.S. promise jobs and opportunities that they cannot get in their own country. The state of poverty or worse destitution that they are living in has pressured and ultimately forced them to leave. Is it really then a choice? How much of this uprooting is a personal choice? How much of this uprooting is forced? How much of this uprooting is a tool, an ideological state apparatus?
What has the history of colonialisms and multiple colonizers done to the Philippines, its people, its economy, its land, its spirit, and its soul? This could be answered in so many ways. To begin with, one could mention the conquest and physical genocide of the many people of the Philippine archipelago. There is also cultural genocide and exploitation that has been perpetuated until now. However, there is also deeper consequences of trauma and suffering that has been passed down from generation to generation. One of the ways this has manifested is the way in which the Filipino elites have sacrificed their own children. The strategy of installing elite Filipinos to rule over the masses and continue the project of colonizing and oppressing their own people is also a result of formal colonialism by Spain and the United States. These Filipino elites care more about their own pockets and the interest of their former masters than they care about their own people. As a result majority of their own people live in poverty, many of whom live in destitution. How can the masses survive? How are they suppose to feed their parents, grandparents, siblings, children, and communities when there are not enough jobs to go around, they do not have land to plant and cultivate food, and are denied government assistance or responsibility? How are they suppose to live when they do not have land to call their own and they must set up make shift houses on top of tombs in the cemeteries or on top of the city’s garbage dumpsite? How are they suppose to live when they are starving because most of the food cultivated and produced in the country are shipped off to the U.S. and other countries?

As a result, Filipinos leave the Philippines, the land of their birth, their families, and the familiar in order to survive. Their choice, which is not even a choice at all, is either to stay in the Philippines, starve, and possibly die or leave in the hopes of making
money to send back to their families so that they may eat, build a home, or send the young to college. In the surface, it seems like a personal choice of survival, which it is but there is also the major factor that pushes Filipinos out of the country. This factor is the Philippine government itself controlled by Filipino elites who are still pushing the colonial agenda and their own internal colonial agenda by capitalizing on the labor and exportation of “warm bodies.” They are still pushing the agenda of the American Dream and they have extended this fantasy to other countries also who have a demand for laborers to build their cities and infrastructures and takeover the domestic role in the home because of the movement of these country’s men and women into the capitalist workforce. The agenda of the Philippine government by encouraging Filipinos to become the world’s workforce dubbing them “modern day heroes” and selling the lies that riches can be found in “America” and other countries of the world is due to its dependence on remittances sent back by those who go abroad. According to the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BNP) the Philippines received approximately $16 billion from January to October 2011 from cumulative remittances. The Philippine government keeps on willing to sacrifice and kick out all of its children just to get some money into the economy and into their own pockets. This “sacrifice” has meant not only the commodification of a people where they are dehumanized and relegated to workers/laborers but also the consequences are deadly. About ten dead bodies, “cold bodies,” of these Filipino workers return to the Philippines on a daily basis. The government is eating up its own children.
The reality therefore is different from the myth. The reality is different from the sold fantasies. The reality is ugly. It is a nightmare. And yet the fantasy is sustained. It is craved for. It is fought for and purposefully sought after.

In 1993 my father left the Philippines to go to Hawai‘i. The allure of the American Dream and the right set of circumstances presented to him influenced his decision to leave the land of his birth where he had lived and never left in his entire life. Because my father served in the Philippine Army under the United States Armed Forces in the Philippines during World War II, he was granted the opportunity of obtaining a visa for entry into the United States. He took advantage of this window of opportunity and filed his paperwork for United States citizenship. Within a few months, he received his naturalization papers and he immediately petitioned for my mother and me. He was presented with the dilemma of where to go in such a big and unfamiliar country. Just like other Ilokano migrants migrating into the United States before him who utilize the network of family and sometimes friends to host and support the new immigrant, my father also contacted several of his relatives in New York, California, and Hawai‘i. The first person to reply to my father was my father’s cousin who invited him to Hawai‘i, offered him the support of the Ortega family, and a place to stay at his parents’ house in Pauoa Valley near downtown Honolulu which my father graciously accepted. He soon bought a plane ticket and settled in Hawai‘i with our relatives.

My mother and I were left in the Philippines but we knew that the day was near when we would eventually join him in Hawai‘i. While waiting for our papers to arrive,
everyone around me was excited that I was going to America. My family, neighbors, and friends from school all fantasized about the riches we were about to acquire as soon as we landed. They talked about snow, tall buildings, cars, shopping, and easily having anything we wanted right on our fingertips.

This rhetoric, way of thinking, and phenomenon was not new to me. Growing up, I was not fully aware of what was happening but I witnessed the landscape changing, people leaving, and the materialization of the influx of money coming in from abroad.

Since Ilokanos make up the majority of Filipinos in the diaspora, the changes were visible in the Ilocos. I saw everything changing around me. I saw and heard about neighbors leaving; young women going to Hong Kong and Singapore as domestic helpers, young men going to Saudi Arabia and Korea as construction workers, and the lucky few who were petitioned by their families to permanently move to the United States and Canada. All throughout the Ilocos the environment was changing. Tall and elaborate houses made up of cemented bricks, jalousie windows, clay tile or galvanized roofs were being erected all over from the remittances and savings brought home by Ilokano balikbayans, returnees, that towered over the bahay kubo (nipa and bamboo thatched hut) of their common neighbors. These houses soon became the ideal and standard model for a home. It was the envy of neighbors and the drive to have it too that influenced others to go abroad to work.

They also equipped their houses with appliances such as refrigerators, televisions, ovens, and the like that were not common at the time except for the rich. Remittances sent home became a representation of the accumulated wealth of those Filipinos residing

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127 My own emphasis. America in this context is an ideology and a fantasy. I used America to invoke that within this idea and fantasy of America, there is the erasure of other countries that make up the American continents.
or working abroad because the money sent home were used to buy their households certain luxuries that they had not experienced before.

Hospitals, churches, bus stops, schools, basketball courts and other projects in the central plazas were built as testimonies of their monetary contributions. All such projects were etched with a list of names of the contributors. Not only were these spaces displaying their émigrés but also their town’s wealth and economic strength. As a child, riding the bus through the central plaza of various towns and municipalities, I came to be familiar with the central plaza as a shrine for Filipinos in the diaspora and the wealth that came with it. Seeing this as a child, I imagined and assumed the excess of wealth of these fellow Ilokano and those countries they were in for they were able to construct whole new towns just from the money they sent back.

As I contemplated my own migration to Hawai’i, I remembered pictures of family members and neighbors who went abroad to America and other countries, which seduced the imagination and reinforced the fairytale of the immigrant success stories. The pictures seemed never to be about the people themselves but more about the place itself acting as the main focus of the pictures. These pictures showcased tall buildings as high as the eye can see, luxurious cars littering the streets that in the Philippines were reserved only for the rich, urban centers that promised modernity and technology, and exotic people and cultures. These pictures seemed to say that as long as you are here, you can experience this, you can have this, and you can be this.

It was hard not to get caught up in the excitement of the seduction of America. I was enchanted with the stories everyone told of this faraway place where one could
literally pick dollar bills off of apple trees. *America, the land of opportunity. America and the American Dream.* It was intoxicating. It was seductive.

I too created a fantasy of my future life in Hawai‘i. I did not know anything about the history or the people of Hawai‘i but what I knew was constructed based on the stories people told, the pictures that I saw throughout my childhood, and the balikbayan (returnee) boxes that were sent from abroad or accompanied their owners when they returned that were filled to the top with various foreign made clothes, chocolates, candies, makeup, canned goods, and toys.

At the same time, my father also directed my understanding and conception of Hawai‘i. In the letters that he sent, he described Hawai‘i as paradise. He wrote about how pleasant the weather was and how beautiful everything was. He also sent pictures that accompanied his letters, which further affirmed my fantasy of Hawai‘i. He also sent boxes that contained macadamia nut candies, postcards that showcased the beauty and exoticism of Hawai‘i, clothing, and books that I requested from him. Receiving these boxes filled me with excitement. These boxes embodied a promise: a promise of material things, success, and a certain lifestyle that can only be attained in America but not in the Philippines. By eating the candies and chocolates, I could taste America. By wearing the clothes, I transcended being an Ilokano/Filipino and was transformed into an American. The act of having these little luxuries earned me bragging rights and a sense of superiority among classmates in school because they wanted to have the treats that I possessed that came from America. At the same time, they also wanted to become my friends because they knew I was going to America. They would ask me to write to them and send them clothes, toys, and chocolates. I became more popular than the popular
kids in school. I was happy with my new status and I was happy to go to America. Everyone around me was also happy and excited for me to go to America. However, I did not realize nor did anyone allude to how my life and theirs would be permanently affected by this move. As a child, I was not fully aware of what leaving meant. In my fantasy, my physical location changes as I move to Hawai‘i from the Philippines; however, I imagined the family I was leaving behind waiting for me upon my arrival in Hawai‘i. I believed that nothing was really going to change. I could not have been more wrong.

On March of 1994, my mother and I, carrying one small suitcase each just like my father when he left, arrived in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. We left everything behind in the Philippines with the belief that we were going to acquire everything easily here.

Upon my arrival here, the fantasy I had about Hawai‘i began to collapse. Riding in my uncle’s car after he picked us up from the airport, I caught a glimpse of the landscape of the east side of O‘ahu as we traveled down the H-1 freeway to our new address. I saw houses along the valleys that extended to the ridges of the mountains and down to the ocean on the right. Some distance to the right along the edge of the ocean, I saw a cluster of tall buildings. Is that it? I thought. Where are all the tall buildings that I imagined? For in my daydreams, I imagined being swallowed up by endless skyscrapers that made me feel like an ant in comparison. I was waiting to be shocked. But instead, there was something about the topography of the island that reminded me of home. Looking at the green mountains extending out to meet the sparkling blue ocean conjured up memories of my home in Pasaleng, Ilocos Norte.
As we pulled up to the Ortega residence, I felt a moment of disappointment. From the driveway, the house looked very short, made out of wood, and had a gray roof that I did not recognize. It paled in comparison to my own house in Pasaleng, which was tall with a high ceiling, sturdy, and structured with cement bricks and galvanized roofing durable enough to withstand the typhoons that we had. Furthermore, the house looked nothing like I imagined my future home in Hawai‘i was going to look like. I envisioned living in a tall building or mansion just like in Home Alone, the movie. I saw myself having a whole suite to myself surrounded by every material luxury a young ten year old could think of. However, what I was seeing and experiencing was in conflict with what I had imagined. My parents and I were confined to a small room with a full size bed, a foldaway bed for me, a dresser, and a small closet. As a result my fantasy began to crumble.

For the first few weeks, we were acquainted with our new environment. The Ortega family took us sightseeing around the island and invited us to their beautiful homes in Mililani, Royal Kunia, and Hawai‘i Kai. They told us stories of how they struggled when they first got here but through hard work they were able to buy their own homes and cars. “This too can be yours,” they said. Their lavish three to five-bedroom homes with swimming pools and expensive cars reinforced their stories. I began to staple my fantasies back together. I wanted to have a house like theirs. I wanted to have a Mercedes Benz or a BMW just like theirs too. One day, I thought, my family and I will have that too.

As the days passed by, life in Hawai‘i began. My mother joined my father in the search for a job. Since he began searching for a job, my father was having a difficult
time adjusting and finding long-term work. Well into his sixties at this time, he had an extensive work experience and impressive credentials from his government position at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the Philippines. However, his experience did not seem to matter and was devalued in the job market here. He had to start at an entry level and the jobs that were offered to him by the hiring agencies were all janitorial or maintenance jobs. On top of that, he was not used to menial labor since he had worked in an office in his entire life. He felt humiliated and degraded as he mopped the floors at McDonald’s, cleaned the toilets at office buildings, and emptied the trash at different places that he worked. At the same time my mother also had a difficult time finding a job even though she had a college education, a teaching degree, and a decade of teaching experience. Just like my father, the only jobs that were offered to her or gave her the opportunity for an interview were janitorial jobs and cashier jobs. She was eventually hired as a waitress at a private business/dining/athletic club that caters to the business and political elites of Hawai‘i. Finding a job was difficult, but getting accustomed to the process of working in a new land also had its difficulties. My mother had a hard time adjusting to the language, culture, and etiquette of America. At the same time, she also endured discrimination and ridicule by her fellow coworkers because her work pace they claimed was too slow and she did not know certain assumed common sense knowledge.

Over the years, my American fantasy was killed. The reality of our living conditions in Hawai‘i challenged the myth of the American dream or American success story. There was no materialization of the success that was promised and narrated in those stories, balikbayan boxes, pictures, and letters. We did not have anything to call
our own. We could not afford to buy our own house. We lived at our relative’s house. The closest thing we had to a personal space was eventually renting the basement section of that house after a year of living in the newer section of the house with my father’s uncle and aunt. There was not a day when we did not hear the sounds of rats scuttling across the ceiling that divided us from the upstairs section of the house. Nor was there a day that we did not kill at least ten cockroaches a day as they hastened across the walls, bathroom floor, sink, and kitchen areas. Life was hard. We were on government assistance and received food stamps. We did not have a car because we could not afford to buy one and my parents never had the opportunity to learn how to drive. Instead, we took public transportation everywhere. Throughout the years, we struggled to make ends meet. My mother has since taken a second job that has her working from five in the morning to eleven o’clock at night. Life has taken a toll on her. She has grown old, weary, and beaten by constant years of struggle.

This story is common to many immigrants here or more specifically Ilokano/Filipino immigrants. They are the hotel workers sitting at the bus stops in Waikiki after a hard days work of cleaning fifteen or so rooms to meet their days quota. They are the landscapers and maintenance workers on the side of the freeway and highway cutting grass and doing yard work. They are the janitors pushing cleaning carts, mopping the floor, emptying out the trash, and cleaning the toilets at shopping malls, schools, business buildings, and airports. They are the food servers taking food orders at fast food establishments like McDonald’s, Jack in the Box, Wendy’s, etc. They are also the cooks in the back cooking and preparing the food in the back of these very same establishments. They are dishwashers. They are nurses. They are greeters at Wal-Mart.
“Double jobs” and “triple jobs” are not uncommon phenomenon in my community. In fact, the notion of a “hard life” is prevalent in how they view their lives in their newly adopted land. Sacrifice or sakripisyo is the way in which they answer their inhospitable sometimes, cruel realities. The parents work, their siblings work, their children work, their cousins work, and even the grandparents work many of whom are even past retirement age. Within one household, which is often an extended household, they all contribute to pay for the rent or mortgage, bills, and food. Furthermore, they all contribute to their families back home: paying to send their son, daughter, cousin, niece, or nephew to go to college, sending balikbayan boxes to relatives, giving money to their town to build a school or church, or sending money to pay for their parents’ hospital bills. This sacrifice they say is less about making their lives better but more about making the lives of their children, siblings, parents, town, and country better. However, what are the consequences of these sacrifices do to the individual? What happens to the soul, the body, and the spirit when you uproot yourself from the land, the people, and the relationships that you have established? What happens when you lose the familiar? The uprooting of Filipinos from the familiar is a violent act. It severs the body, the soul, and the spirit. The constant battle to survive, constantly working, constantly abusing the body also takes its toll. All of these are layers of violence and oppression place upon the individual, upon a whole group of people.
Chapter 5

Panagkalkallautang/Aimless Wandering

An immigrant is one who has somehow already planted her roots somewhere and established connections and relationships in her homeland or birthland. As an immigrant, it can be approximated that before I came here there was a sense of stability for me in the Ilocos even if it was not a perfect stability. The movement of the immigrant from one place to another, this notion of uprooting, disrupts this sense of stability. Because of this disruption, ties to the land, the culture, and the people are somehow broken. As a result, the immigrant is a divided self, a fragmented self, and an uprooted self. An uprooted self therefore is also a violated self, a wounded self, and a torn self.

The immigrant is caught in between two worlds. She no longer belongs there and does not belong here. She is neither here nor there. She is not fixed anywhere. She is not really grounded. As a result, the immigrant is in a state of instability hence she is always wandering. The conditions are not permanent; however, she is always searching for the possibility, the dream, and the idea of stability.

When faced with instability and a cruel reality, what are her options? How can she face the brutal reality of injustice and alienation as she searches for stability and a new home? What are her choices and possibilities to achieve stability and survival?

The first time I tried to remember this story I broke down into tears, sobbing, and crying my eyes out at length in front of my political science class while presenting my final paper. It was the paper that started this project. It was hard to write but it was even harder to talk about it. Remembering my past made me vulnerable. I was naked. I was
exposed. I do not even know how to begin to remember something so painful. I do not even know if I want to.

Where do I begin? How do I unearth the pain? How do I name the pain? How can I describe the pain?
beaten, defeated, abused, knocked down, insulted

kicked, pushed, reviled, hated
TEARS flowing down my face

I feel
broken injured fragmented
CUT
BLEEDING
aching throbbing stinging

Lost

pain injury pain injury
suffering, torment, agony, torture

sorrow
misery
sadness

nauseous
My trauma did not start in Hawai‘i. I once thought it did. I thought so then because the experience was overtly painful. However I now understand that I have been traumatized since birth. The world that we live in is no longer uncontaminated or unaffected. As a result, everyone, both the colonizer and the colonized, experiences some form of trauma. Many like me experience trauma layer after layer after layer.

My experience in the Hawai‘i education system is one that is marked by violence: physically, emotionally, and psychologically. As a newly arrived immigrant to the State of Hawai‘i, I entered fifth grade in April of 1994. From that moment on, I was subjected to another layer of colonial education and the policing of my difference.

My colonial education in Hawai‘i was different but at the same time similar to what I received in the Philippines. It was different because Catholicism was not embedded in my education and I was not mandated to live my life through the ideals of Catholic faith. It was also different because it rendered my national Filipino self invisible. There I was in my elementary, intermediate, and high school years surrounded by a variety of skin colors and faces of my classmates who were Native Hawaiians, Chinese, Japanese, white, Filipino, Laotian, Vietnamese, Puerto Rican, mixed race kids, learning about the dominant narrative of white American history and knowledge produced and appropriated by Euro-Americans. It all seemed so normalized and naturalized. No one ever questioned why we were looking and understanding the world through only one window. This way was the only legitimate and acceptable way. This window was only comprised of Science, Social Studies (United States history and World History), Mathematics, Physical Education, Computer, and English classes.
The education I received in Hawai‘i was also similar to the education I received growing up in the Philippines because it was repressive. I was invisible in multiple levels. First, my Ilokano self was not present and represented just like in my educational experience in the Philippines and second, I was rendered invisible because my Filipino self was also repressed. Instead of the nationalistic educational project that I received under Filipino nationalism, it was replaced by an education and curriculum that was disproportionately white supremacist and Euro-American centric.

The curriculum is but one level of violence of making a good colonial subject. It is much more hidden and eased in. However on a more personal and social level the implications of colonial education, institutions, and consciousness are more violent and manifests into supposed “common knowledge” as jokes, stereotypes, and essentialisms.

“Hoy”

I was not even Nadine. I was reduced to a “Hoy”. Nameless. Not worthy of a name. Not even human.

“Psssssst”

Someone once said that “Psssst” was the universal Filipino call. People said that the moment you say it in public, you could tell who is Filipino because s/he will turn her/his head in acknowledgement. “Pssst” and “hoy” usually accompanied each other. Supposedly only Filipinos answer to this call. Filipinos become reduced to mere sounds.

“Eh, you Igorot”

Igorot. Igarut. Eh garrut. It has been pronounced and written in many ways to mock and taunt me. How Igorot, the name of one of the indigenous peoples of the
Philippines, as a term transformed into a derogatory name, I do not know. How Igorot and its derogatory meaning come to the shores of Hawai‘i, I cannot guarantee that I know. I speculate that it has its roots with the history of colonialism in the Philippines. Colonial travelers, writers, priests, missionaries, and soldiers wrote about and took pictures of their encounters with brown and dark skinned people living in the uplands of the Cordillera Mountain Range wearing their baag, loincloth and indigenous garb. How did the Igorot come to classify all of the indigenous peoples of that area? How did the image and mere mention of the term Igorot come to signify dark, savage, primitive, and uncivilized? Furthermore, how did it become to represent Filipinos who have not assimilated into the dominant culture? How did FOB, fresh-off-the-boat, and Igorot signify backwardness or regression?

“Filipinos eat black dog”

Peee-leee-pee-no. Bblaaackkkkkk dooog. I could not escape the “Filipino accent.” Everywhere I turned I was haunted by it. This is how Filipinos supposedly talk. Harsh, rough, and guttural. On top of that, the stereotype that we eat black dog is unavoidable. We become the image of dog eating people as if we are the only people to have ever eaten dogs. Being a Filipino becomes synonymous with dog eater. We are seen as predators ready to steal any dog we encounter whenever we are hungry. This dehumanization process renders Filipinos as animalistic, driven by desire and instinct and less by a higher mental capacity.

“You bukbok”

A bukbok is a bug that multiplies fast and eats at and destroys the foundation of a house. It has transitioned into a derogatory name in Hawai‘i for someone who is a newly
arrived Filipino immigrant or who show characteristics of being an FOB. I cannot even begin to unravel how problematic such references and insults are. Similar to the stereotype of Micronesians as “cockroaches” because they survived repeated bombings by the United States military, Filipinos are equated to bukboks. It is so violent and damaging to be referred to a bug. This stereotype alludes to the ever-increasing number of Filipinos in Hawai‘i because of chain migration. Because of this, we have become pests that must be exterminated because we are becoming a threat.

Lyrics of Filipino Christmas by Frank DeLima\textsuperscript{128}

\begin{quote}
“Ding ding ding ding ding ding ding ding ding ding ding dong ding dong Ding ding dong ding dong ding ding ding ding ding ding ding ding
don
dong
don

O Christmas tree o Christmas tree a Filipino Christmas tree

Makadangdang soyout billy goat dangalagala bout bout (bout bout)
Galagala billygoat tala billy boy sue sala silly toy too
Makadangdang soyout billygoat dangalagala bout bout (bout bout)
Galagala billygoat tala billy bot sue sala silly toy too
Balut balut balut ditoy eat kalamonggay yot soy barrrrrrrang di toy
Bagaong bagaong bagaong di toy eat kalamonggay ottot TAK! Ung dagadangbarrrrrrang
dang dang ditoy
Makadangdang soyout billy goat dangalagala bout bout (bout bout)
gal gala billygoat tala billy boy sue sala silly toy too

Black dog roasting on an open fire bagaong boiling on the stove
Hearrr the dog in the balley arf arf arf arf arf arf arf arf arf arf arf arf
and the chicken in Kalihi bawk bawk bawk bawk bawk bawk bawk bawk bawk bawk
bawk bawk bawk
Little do they know they going to be adobo dinner for the Filipino clan bum bum

Oh come all you peoPUL! Joypul and triumPANT! Oh come YOU! Oh come YOU! To E-e-wa Beach!
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{128} Frank DeLima is a comedian in Hawai‘i who specializes in racial/ethnic jokes. The Filipino Christmas song is very popular and it is played during Christmas time in many of the mainstream radio stations in Hawai‘i.
Come to Waialua and Kalihi uka you’ll pind us in waipaHU! You’ll pind us in waipaHU! you’ll pind us in waipaahuuuuuu and E-e-wa Beach!
Aaaaaaaaaaammmmmmmmeeeeeeennnngggggg

The first injury that I can recall was an incident that occurred the first day of my sixth grade school year. It was a few minutes before the initial bell was to ring to mark the beginning of the school day; everyone was waiting outside the classroom door. I was standing against the railing when out of the blue one of my classmates said my name. I looked up and realized that everyone was looking at me. I could hear snippets of their conversations as I was alerted to the fact that they were talking about me. They were pointing at me and laughing. Soon enough almost everyone joined in to partake in the mockery. They were mocking the “Filipino accent” and ultimately they were mocking me as if I embodied the Filipino people. They preyed on this stereotype of Filipinos and said many hurtful and demeaning things that my mind can no longer remember or else refuses to remember. However I remember a feeling: a feeling that still fills my eyes with tears every time I try to remember. This incident was the first time in my life I have ever felt alone, vulnerable, and hurt for something I did not have any control over or could not change.

Throughout my sixth grade school year, my fellow classmates picked on me. They ridiculed me for my “Filipino accent”. It was abusive: emotionally and psychologically.

This is what has been called the political economy of language. In a given social setting and location, there is a dominant language or a language of power set in place. Furthermore, there is an investment in its dominance. What underlies the political

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economy of language therefore is power. Power sets the standard. Power is the standard. Those in power have an investment in the maintenance of this system. In the material economy that we live in that assigns value to almost everything, it creates a bifurcated world. Those of which are associated with power are valued while those that are not are undervalued. Roy Iutzi-Mitchell argues:

When one class of people controls the exchange values in a society, i.e., controls which languages, for example, can be used as cultural capital in order to acquire economic capital, wealth, power, and prestige, then we have what Bourdieu would call symbolic domination or cultural violence… By controlling the ‘international exchange rate’ (I might call it) whereby English as high value and the Native language very little, the schools – both as educators and as local employers – have undermined and continue to undermine the value of the local language within the local habitus, leading to a down-valuing of the local culture as well.130

The present reality of the material economy considers language as a resource, a capital that can be assigned a value. Language, according to this view, including other forces and “objects of economic activity”131 form the foundation of the socioeconomic system. They are interestingly enough distributed unevenly throughout the community. The unequal distribution and access unearths the power and class dynamics that are present. This translates into what Bourdieu calls a “linguistic marketplace”:

In a class-based society, he points out, where social classes and class-linked activities correlate with linguistic variation, the linguistic varieties acquire differential value that translates into economic value. Access to high position and prestigious social circles may require, or seem to

require, the ability to speak or write in a prestigious language, variety, or style, whose acquisition becomes the focus of economic activity. People who fail to acquire the high variety, such as a national standard, at their mother’s knee must pay for instruction later on, whether through tutoring, how-to books (more often how-not-to), newspaper columns about “proper speaking,” or state subvention through the school system.  

The investment on a standard also presupposes that there are experts or authentic speakers. At the same time, it assumes that there exists an authentic language or authentic variety of that language. These experts then become the authority. As a result the value of that language economically and symbolically rests on this authority: the authentication by this authority.

Given the layers of colonialism, both colonialism under the U.S. Empire and settler colonialism under the Asian and white settlers, Hawai‘i has two languages clashing against each other, Standard English from the United States and a pidgin or “unaccented English” from the local inhabitants that are trying to differentiate themselves from the white hegemony.

The history of Hawai‘i needs to be unpacked in order to uncover the various power relations competing within the islands. Kanaka Maoli or Kanaka ʻŌiwi, Native Hawaiians, are the original inhabitants who are ancestrally and genealogically tied to these islands. They established their own sovereign nation and government, the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, until the illegal overthrow of that government by the plantation oligarchy. Since then Hawai‘i has been illegally annexed by the United States under the Joint House Resolution of 1898 and incorporated into a state in 1959 even under the protest of Native Hawaiians and non-natives. Hawai‘i is now the fiftieth state of the United States but this

\[132\] Ibid., 256.
incorporation abjects the existence of a colonial system set in place that still remains. This system is invested in silencing the claims and voices of Native Hawaiians and the history and presence of colonialism. This system is comprised of the existence and placement of dominant structures and institutions such as the schools and scholarship, the prisons and punishment, and the military and war that shape its present reality. The norm is the US-Western political, legal, economic, and educational systems. In addition to this, the dominance of US culture and English, the colonial language, mark its present as a colonial state.

At the same time there was also a plantation colonialism that was happening internally within the islands at the same time. Since the arrival of Captain James Cook, there has been a quest for power and control by white businessmen to gain control of the Hawaiian Kingdom. This put them against Native Hawaiian governing officials who themselves were trying to hold on to their rule and control amidst a growing pressure from the increase of foreign population onto the shores of Hawai‘i. The illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom forced a shift in power and control towards the plantation oligarchy that were profiting from their dominance in the sugar industry in Hawai‘i. The usurpation of power allowed them the freedom that they did not have under the Kingdom.

The overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom initiated the rise of the English language school. As the white plantation oligarchy took governmental power, public funding was redirected to English language schools and away from the Hawaiian language school. As a result, Hawaiian language schools shriveled, English language schools flourished. The dominant narrative about Hawai‘i and Native Hawaiians makes it seem that Native Hawaiians were victimized and forcibly indoctrinated into Western education. However,
Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua argues that this rhetoric is a misrepresentation and thereby erases the agency of Native Hawaiians. Kānaka Maoli teachers “comprised a majority of the islands’ teachers throughout the 19th century, right up until the 1893 illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy,”\(^{133}\) she writes, and thereby played a prominent role in the dispersal of literacy within the educational system during the Kingdom. However, after the overthrow, a different school system was established. The plantation oligarchy, businessmen and descendants of the missionaries, invested in a plantation economy developed a public school system tailored to their priorities.

The plantation economy was big business. The plantation owners recruited many workers from various places but primarily from Asia. The plantation economy was founded on the notion of “divide and conquer” that racialized and segregated its subjects. This structure “served the planters’ interests as it discouraged collective action organization among the different groups against the plantation management.”\(^{134}\) At the same time, the plantation oligarchy saw no reason to educate the Asian and Pacific Islanders that made up their work force, stifling critique and uprising.

The reasons for the establishment of the Hawai‘i public school system within the plantation economy hegemony in Hawai‘i was primarily to justify their authority to the rest of the population of Hawai‘i, maintain their labor force, and for the Native people and peoples of color to learn how to be Americans, within their proper place in the hierarchy. Within the plantation colonialism, the English language school was designated the authority and legitimacy as the only public school system. It functioned to suppress Native Hawaiians and their claims immediately after the overthrow as a way of


“masking the violent means of coercion and producing consent to US rule.” In *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, Goodyear-Kaʻōpua further argues:

On a policy level, the aim was to fracture the historical precedent of recognizing Hawaiʻi as an autonomous nation-state and instead establish a subordinate relationship between the US government and the Kanaka ʻOiwi, without our aupuni (government). On an ideological level, the goal was to transform Kanaka Maoli collective understanding of ourselves from a self-governing political body to a small and relatively powerless racial minority domesticated under the United States. These dual forces have shaped public education in the islands ever since.

The model of education disseminated in the islands to the Hawaiian population was assimilationist and white supremacist. Its function was to erase Native Hawaiian history and silence its population. It also functioned to delegitimize their claim to their land and their government. Furthermore, it sought to transform them into another racial group within the United States national boundary.

As a colonial state under the United States empire, Hawaiʻi is structured to function within the system that was constructed to facilitate the racist hegemony of the United States government and therefore perpetuate and sustain the life of the system. Not only have these structures functioned to maintain the status quo, it has also worked to try to mold its colonial subjects. The imperial policies and assimilation policies have functioned as a genocidal tactic to repress native culture and language. This was perpetuated and reinforced through education and the school system, which tends to erase their culture, render them invisible, and indoctrinate them to become good colonial subjects.

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136 Ibid., 22.
While one function of the Hawai‘i public school system was to silence those who have legitimate claims to the land that the plantation businessmen stole, it was also used to maintain the plantation economy and maintain the power of the plantation businessmen over its workers. Hence the public school system was not created for the literacy of the plantation population. It was for the creation of a labor force. It was a system that created a hierarchy of labor for the exploitative plantation economy.

The project of the public educational system is not a one-way road to indoctrinate the colonized; it was also geared toward the colonizers. The English language school with its Euro/US-centric education benefitted American foreigners and their children. This education ensured the production and reproduction of future elites and rulers. It kept the power within the hands of the Americans. The language and culture of the “center” was English and American; therefore, the language and culture taught were those of the language and culture of power from the “center.”

While the public school system created a hierarchy where the Americans were elevated to the top of the pyramid and degraded the Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, and other plantation workers at the bottom, it also created a middle position for the Portuguese and other Europeans that were employed in the plantation economy who were not members of the ruling elites. They were classified as “Europeans”; however they were a minority in number, status, and power in terms of other “whites” within the Hawai‘i population. They were also workers and therefore employed by the plantation system. As a result, “they occupied a socioeconomic position between that of the haole [foreigners] plantation owners and the Asian laborers”137 because they were able to hold

137 Sato, Linguistic Inequality in Hawai‘i, 259.
“middle management positions”\textsuperscript{138} as *lunas* (overseers). In addition to this limited privilege, they were also offered free schooling in the Hawai‘i public education system and land by the virtue of belonging to the European category.

Eventually the public education system embedded with the culture of the plantation economy has also elevated certain settlers into power and created a new settler economy or settler colonialism where certain settlers have been able to get a little piece of the pie. Settler colonialism is another colonialism happening alongside other colonialisms. Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua expands on this issue of which groups of settlers are found higher up in the hierarchy and which groups are found on the bottom when she writes:

\begin{quote}
With Native Hawaiians, other socioeconomically-subordinated ethnic groups including Filipinos, Samoans, and Latinos comprise a substantial majority of Hawai‘i’s public school enrollment. But the representation of these groups sharply declines as one looks up the institutional hierarchy, while the representation of socioeconomically-privileged ethnic groups – Japanese, Haole and Chinese – increases.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

Needless to say, there are certain individual members of Native Hawaiians and Filipinos who have ascended to top-level positions and attained certain levels of socioeconomic status; however these are rare in comparison to other Native Hawaiians and Filipinos who make up the majority of those in the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. At the same time, there are members of the Japanese, haole, and Chinese who are not part of the elites in Hawai‘i; however, the elite members of Hawai‘i are overwhelmingly Japanese, Haole, and Chinese.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, 23.
In turn this settler society reproduces the same colonial systems and fails to see its complicity in that reproduction. As settlers, they are invested in the maintenance of the neocolonial system that suppresses those settlers who migrated after them or who as a racial or ethnolinguistic group do not possess the level of power that they have attained. At the same time, they are also invested in the stifling of Native voices and denial of the claims of Native Hawaiians who are fighting for self-determination. Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, detailing the longevity and pervasiveness of this system, writes:

Throughout the next century, assimilatory education propped a plantation economy and worked to legitimize American settler colonialism. For the overthrow forward through to the present-day, the settler state’s educational system has functioned to reproduce a society not only unequal but largely blind to its own coloniality.  

Since then the colonial system and its policies of assimilation have also affected newly arriving immigrants to the state because their cultures and languages have been closely policed and supervised. They are submerged in American culture and are forced to navigate through the system where English is the language of work, industry, and education. As a result, their identities are made invisible and their voices silenced.

While there is no official English-only policy in the United States and in Hawaiʻi, English however has become what Hernandez-Chavez calls “the de facto national language.” It is not official because it is not set in stone; however, it does not even need to be. It has become so normalized in our psyche that it is not even acknowledged. It just is. Just like other things that are normalized, it has become the silent and invisible

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140 Ibid., 22.
standard. It is the norm. It is unnoticed and unquestioned. As a result, that is where its power lies.

The school system, as a result, becomes an ideological state apparatus for the dissemination of American culture and the English language. It creates and constructs subjects molded from the standard. It tries to create a replica of the dominant culture and projects it unto their subjects. The school system valorizes English by using English as the language instruction and elevates American culture by giving preference to Western history specifically a Euro-American history. There is no encouragement or recognition of diversity. Different ethnicities, cultures, and native peoples are simply glossed over or rendered invisible. By choosing one language and one culture to teach, the school system privileges one way of looking at, engaging with, and understanding the world.

While this system indoctrinates immigrants into the system, it already has indoctrinated a whole population of subjects who not only perpetuate the system but, also polices others who threaten the system by introducing different ways of looking at the world. Historically and presently the manifestation of this regulation can be seen through ethnic jokes, ridicule, mockery and the materialization of stereotypes, which have been repeated and perpetuated throughout several decades of contact.

The policing of accents and the privileging of the English language are part of the political economy of language where English, more specifically the false belief of the existence of an “unaccented English” is valued higher than any other language. An accent challenges the standard. It is subversive to this standard; therefore the act of ridicule is a way to keep those who are different in check.
Both the school system as an ideological state apparatus to embed the hegemonic language and culture of America and the policing by the colonial subjects of their selves and others both reinforce each other. In my story, my fellow classmates, having been indoctrinated and trained to privilege one language and one culture, served to police and monitor others from challenging this system. This regulation ensures the existence and perpetuation of this system.

The Hawai‘i context is slightly different from the Standard English that is perpetuated in the continental United States because of Hawai‘i’s diverse population. Because the plantation economy brought many different groups of people into the Hawaiian Islands to work as plantation workers, many of them eventually settled and created a life here. The descendants of these plantation workers and the continued immigration of Asian groups and Pacific Islanders now make up the majority of the population of Hawai‘i. This diverse population has created an environment where Pidgin English has flourished. It has become the dominant language among the majority of the population. Charlene J. Sato in *Linguistic Inequality in Hawai‘i: The Post-Creole Dilemma* quotes Decamp and Whinnom in defining *pidgin*:

1. A *pidgin* is “a contact vernacular, normally not the native language of any of its speakers. It is used in trading or in any situation requiring communication between persons who do not speak each other’s native languages. It is characterized by a limited vocabulary, an elimination of many grammatical devices such as number and gender, and a drastic reduction of redundant features” (DeCamp, 1971: 15).

A pidgin “always arises . . . from a situation involving a target language and two or more substrate languages; where that socially superior target language is sufficiently inaccessible to the substrate speakers that there is little motivation to improve performance and where a “defective
language can be functionally adequate” (Whinnom, 1971: 106).\(^{142}\)

Hawai‘i Pidgin English (HPE) used by the majority of Hawai‘i’s inhabitants along with Standard English that is used in the business and political arena are both used simultaneously in Hawai‘i. Both function to police each other and to police from within. In the business and political arena, Standard English is privileged as the norm because of the ties of business and politics to the continental United States, the center of power. Within this circle, Hawai‘i Pidgin English is seen as uneducated and unintelligent speech. However, among the rest of the population, its speakers use Hawai‘i Pidgin English in order to separate themselves from Standard English because of the distinct history of Hawai‘i. It is the manifestation of the division and segregation created from the plantation economy. As a result, it is a marker of local identity, which invokes an inclusion or belonging among the diverse population of Hawai‘i apart from the culture and language of power. At the same time, these speakers have also functioned to police newer immigrants into this system almost like a hazing ritual.

The mockery and teasing that I received in school is a manifestation of this ritual. Although there has been a distinct policing of the “Filipino accent” in comparison to other accents, it is still certainly a component of the policing of language. It may be attributed to the fact that those in power in Hawai‘i such as the Japanese, haole, and Chinese excludes themselves from this policing and diverts the attention away from themselves to other immigrants who are on the bottom of the power and social hierarchy. Thus their accents become normalized and furthermore their accents become no longer

\(^{142}\) Sato, *Linguistic Inequality in Hawai‘i*, 256.
accents. Their speech becomes the standard while the speech of others become subversive and different.

My accent challenged the norm and I was punished for it. However I did not only encounter verbal teasing from my classmates in sixth grade, it was also physical. I was kicked, pushed, shoved, and tripped. They also threw “spit balls” or crumpled pieces of paper at me or hid my property. They hurled or flicked green peas at me during lunch. Because the whole sixth grade class ridiculed me, I was relegated as an outcast. It created such a hostile environment where I constantly feared what my classmates would do to me on a daily basis. At the same time nobody wanted to be associated with me because they did not want to be ridiculed also nor did they want or try to stick up for me; instead, they joined alongside the majority in my mistreatment.

Experiencing such constant mistreatment on a daily basis made going to school equal to torture for me. I began to detest going to school. I dreaded the days when my teacher implemented group work or group assignment because I was always the last person picked or my teacher would have to assign me to a group because I did not have one. The worst part was not even the fact that I was picked last or assigned but it was that no one wanted me in their group. The group that I would eventually end up with would grumble because they did not want to be stuck with me. They viewed my assignment into their group as an intrusion. I was an undesirable, unwelcomed and shunned. I was unwanted by the very people I saw five days a week. I was trapped and I could not get out.

One especially haunting memory that has remained in my mind was during one of our field trips. There were many bus rides during many field trips that I found myself
sitting next to someone to and from school who did not want to sit next to me. On this specific day, everyone was excited to leave the classroom and go on a field trip. Many of my classmates were pushing and shoving each other to get in the school bus. As a result I was one of the last students to board. When I got to the last step the bus looked crowded. I scanned the length of the bus looking for an empty seat. I eventually found the only empty seat next to a girl named T who was the same girl who pointed at me the first day of school and initiated the teasing. She was very loud and outspoken. She also liked to make fun of me especially. The moment I sat next to her she looked at me with disbelief, looked the other way, and yelled loudly, “FUCK!” She turned back towards me and gave me a look of disgust and utmost hatred. She scooted closer to the window to get as much space away from me as possible. She also folded her arms, shook her head, and continued to give me dirty looks throughout the whole bus ride. During the bus ride to our destination, she ignored me and talked to her friends who sat in front of us. Knowingly aware of my presence, she told them, “Why the fuck do I have to be stuck with Nadine?” While she gave me dirty looks, her and her friends continued to talk and make fun of me throughout the whole bus ride.

After the tour, we were instructed to sit in the same seats that we sat on going there; therefore on the way back to school, I had to sit next to T again. I could tell that she was angry with this arrangement because she had to sit with me again. When we sat down she folded her arms and did not even look at me. She looked anxious and restless. As the bus traveled back to school, she suddenly snapped at me. She turned towards me and yelled, “Why do you have to sit next to me? Sit somewhere else! I don’t want to sit next to you! Nobody wants to sit next to you. In fact, nobody wants you around. Why
are you even here? Why don’t you go back to where you came from? Go back to the Philippines.” As she yelled at me, I did not reply. I said nothing. Just like the first day of school, I kept quiet.

I felt defeated and hopeless. My reality was so painful that I chose silence. I chose to be silent as a defense mechanism. I spoke to no one. My silence became my solace in the chaos that was my world. Sometimes days would pass or even a whole week would pass without the utterance of a single word from me. Silence allowed me the chance to deny the harsh reality of the discrimination that I faced. In the middle of the chaos of negativity and pain that was becoming a normalized occurrence in my life at school, there was my silence. I was silent because it was painful. I did not know how to respond. I could not respond. Even when I tried, my classmates would hurl insults back at me even faster than I could process them. I gave up even trying to answer or reason with them.

I was alone and I did not belong. I was depressed. I had no one to confide in and there was no one who understood what I was going through. My parents were hardly home because they were working and I no longer had the comfort of my family back in the Philippines. I was cut off from them because at that time they did not have telephones in their houses just yet and letters took weeks to travel. I wanted nothing more than to be back in their loving embraces and consoled by their voices. I cried and begged my parents to let me go back but they said that Hawai‘i was our new home.

I did not have a choice. I had to live with the situation that I was placed in. I was lost in a new world that did not accept me for who I was. It demanded me to change and so I did.
Because I could not change my situation, I had to cope with it. In order to cope, I had to forget. I had to forget who I was or at least silence who I was. My survival was contingent on forgetting and suppressing. I was constantly abused and beaten down. I was dying inside. I was forced to forget or at least I forced myself to forget. I had to turn off certain parts of myself in order to move forward and make life bearable for me.

Just like a good colonized subject, I imitated and mimicked the world around me in order to fit in. I wanted to blend in. I did not want to be different. I wanted to be what I thought at that time a common sixth grader should be. I did not want to be myself. I wanted to be like everybody else.

I began my assimilation process by absorbing as much US-American culture as I could. I used the television as a tool to observe and learn. I watched and observed the world around me. I copied their mannerisms, style, the way they spoke, and the way they carried themselves. Certain phrases and words that people used began to creep up in my vocabulary. More specifically, I learned swear words, obscenities. I was able to hurl back profanities at those who teased me and mistreated me. I could not challenge them to the full extent that I wanted to but I could say, “Fuck you!”

However the assimilation process caused me to internalize my inferiority. I valorized US-American culture and the English language. This internalization made me subscribe to the ideology of US-American superiority at the expense of my Ilokano identity. I detached myself from my Ilokano and Filipino identity. I even shied away from eating Filipino food because of the smell of patis, fish sauce, or buggoong, fermented fish paste, which emanated from the dishes. It signaled backwardness and
anachrony. All things that were once familiar and part of my daily life were replaced by McDonald’s or US-American products.

The assimilation process also instilled shame. I became ashamed to be identified as Ilokano or Filipino. There was so much negativity that accompanied the term. I wanted to escape those stereotypes and relinquish any association with that identity. In addition to being ashamed of my identity as an Ilokano/Filipino, I began to be ashamed of my parents, their work, and our economic condition. They became a symbol of my past, where I came from, and where I started. They still spoke Ilokano unless they spoke to someone who was not. They still held on to their culture and language. At that time, I looked down upon them because it seemed that they were still clinging to and stuck in the past, unable to blend in, and unable to adjust. They still “acted Filipino.” I was also ashamed because we were poor. We were on welfare and food stamps and my mother was the primary breadwinner. I was unhappy seeing what other people had and what we did not. Being poor made me ashamed to be me.

It was not until college that I found the courage to face my past and remember again. My undergraduate years were spent searching from one class to another for something that was missing. I was unable to fill the void in my spirit. I did not know what it was and could not find it. My graduate education eventually helped me realize that I have been dealing with colonial trauma and that I needed to heal. I met others who were dealing with the same trauma, trying to find their own voice, and attempting to uncover their stories and the communities’ stories. I was inspired and strengthened by their voices and experiences. It is because of them that I have the courage to write so that I could better understand the death that has occurred inside me through the process of
assimilation into the dominant culture. The loss of my language and culture killed a part of my Ilokano identity. I do not even know if I can get it back. However, I write and remember in order to name the pain and reclaim my story.
The ethical duty of the immigrant is to return to herself, to return to those that pains her, to return to the naming, to return to the Lam-ang. The first principle, the first reason that will inaugurate our healing which is the purpose of this work is to be able to name what really ails us, what makes us sick literally in mind, body, soul and spirit. The act of naming is an act of returning. Panagkawili therefore is a sense of returning to all things that will commence or inaugurate our sense of healing: a healing not only of the body but also of the spirit.

The act of going back to the Philippines is a literal, one layer of coming to terms with the possibility of healing. However there is also another layer, a difficult layer, that which is psychic, spiritual, and mental. It is also a healing of knowledge. The fact that I have lost the knowledge of my people, my language, and my culture is a sickness. The fact that I speak an alien language that I have adopted as my primary tongue is a sickness. Language is not a tool or an apparatus. Language is a residence of the soul. No longer being able to converse with my family in Ilokano is pathological. It means that I am sick. I am traumatized. There was a certain intention for me to lose my language and accent. The disposing or repression of my language and accent allowed me to establish a new sense of me, which is also pathological: from a pathological self to another pathological self. However when confronted with the reality and consciousness of the situation where I could no longer talk to my own family, it was painful and I realized the trauma of forgetting and intentionally losing my language. My lips and my thoughts were no longer in sync because I understood everything in my head but was unable to respond
with my lips. My mouth was no longer cooperating. I realized that I needed to be a resident of my language. My redemption is that I still have the capacity to go back to that language, to reclaim, and to remember again.

I could see the black smog like a thick blanket hovering over a vast cluster of buildings, highways, and houses as I looked outside the window of the Philippine Airlines plane that I have been confined in for over ten hours from Hawai‘i to Manila. I could not wait to get out of the plane since it had been an unbearably turbulent ride. I hated the thought of flying and having no illusion of control over your life as you would have if you had your own two feet planted firmly on the ground. I gripped the armrest firmly feeling my heartbeat pulsate faster and faster as the plane touched down on the tarmac and gained speed. My palms were sweaty as the plane slowed down and came to a stop. I unwillingly let go of the armrest and unbuckled my seatbelt greedily. I was excited and slightly nervous to finally see my family, as I had not returned to the Philippines in almost a decade. It was now 2006 and I knew it was going to be different: different from the Philippines I left behind, different from the Philippines in my hazy memory, and different from my Westernized lifestyle in Hawai‘i. I was also different. I was all grown up. I was twenty-two years old attending college. I was working. I lived in an apartment with my boyfriend. I was independent. My life seemed fairly typical of those my age.

I followed my mother and father out of the plane clutching my pink blanket, purse, and carry-on baggage. As I exited the comfort of the air-conditioned cabin, the stale, inescapable heat of Manila instantly enveloped me. I felt sweat formulating on my forehead and the back of my neck. The heat of the afternoon sun penetrated the glass
wall of the jetway and made the inside unbearably hot. The jetway was lined with male porters and airline workers. I could feel their eyes looking at me as they smile and purposely greet the young balikbayan girls exiting the plane. I heard one or two say hello as I passed them and I returned an uneasy smile. I followed my parents and the rest of the other passengers through the newly constructed terminal in the Ninoy Aquino International Airport called Centennial Terminal, which was exclusively for Philippine Airlines.

Ninoy Aquino International Airport was once called Manila International Airport but renamed after the assassination of Ninoy Aquino on the tarmac of MIA as he returned after a self-imposed exile. Ninoy Aquino was the popular political rival to president-turned-dictator-turned-president Ferdinand Marcos whose twenty-one year administration was known for corruption, human rights violations, repression, and violence. The assassination of Ninoy Aquino spurred the People Power Revolution in February 1986, which deposed Marcos and forced him into exile in Hawai‘i.

This violent and corrupt political history is rooted in the colonial history of the Philippines: first with Spain, second with the United States, and also with Japan. Every colonial master has employed the “divide and conquer” strategy in the Philippines. They gathered some Filipino people to their side and elevated them to positions of power thereby bifurcating the Philippine population. This created a class system. Just like Spain, the United States utilized a class system in the Philippines to their advantage in order to divide the Filipino people and to quell the resistance. They conceded secondary government positions of the U.S. colonial regime to the middle and upper class that were easily won over by the promise of prestige and profit. This group of elite Filipinos
benefitted immensely from U.S. colonial rule because they were trained by the colonial government to work various positions under the regime. The U.S. also offered scholarship opportunities, which enabled the sons of the elite to study in the United States and eventually return to the Philippines to work under the colonial government. This created a supply of Filipino colonial subjects who were trained in and knowledgeable of the American economic and political system. Since then these elite Filipinos have perpetuated the American system set in place and prioritized American interests in the region because this system also benefitted them. They no longer cared about the interests of the Filipinos but only the interests of America, pleasing and becoming closer to the colonial master, and benefiting their elite class. In order to hold on to this power they have sacrificed and turned their backs on the rest of the Filipino people. Philippine political history is therefore marred by this colonial history and the constant vying for power by the elites.

Not much has changed since then. The Philippines and its people still live in the shadow of the aftermath of its colonial history: exploitation by the United States on one level and exploitation by these appointed elites on another.

From Ninoy Aquino International Airport, my family and I made our way to Sampaloc, Manila during the heavy traffic of the early evening. We crammed into a van rented by my family. Once inside I was elated to be refreshed by the air-conditioner but I felt sticky and sooty from the heavy pollution of Manila. We crept through traffic slowly and I watched outside the window as day turned into night. I watched as Manila came alive in the darkness. There were hoards of people walking and jumping on and off jeepneys, tricycles, and buses. The sides of buildings were illuminated by colossal
billboards of movie stars advertising everything from food to clothes. I could also hear music blasting from various restaurants and nightclubs that lined the streets. The smell of street food escaped inside the van but I could detect something more pungent. It was the smell of sewer, garbage, and heat combined that is forever a permanent character of Manila. My thoughts were eventually interrupted by several knocks on the window as we stopped. There on the median were six to eight children with their arms outstretched and palms cupped upward following the van as we inched through traffic. I must have looked bewildered because someone informed me that these kids were squatters, homeless kids, who were in fact panhandling. I felt guilty. I felt uncomfortable because I could not look away and simply ignore their presence but at the same time it was awkward to watch because I felt like I needed to help them. While I sat there in my discomfort, I watched as the driver shooed the kids away yelling something in Tagalog that I did not catch. *It’s bad enough to encounter adult panhandlers, I thought, but it is even worse when they are kids.*

As I sit there I remembered Claire Danes, Hollywood actress, who shot her film *Brokedown Palace* in Manila who said in an interview with Premiere Magazine, “The city just fucking smelled of cockroaches. There’s no sewage system in Manila and people have nothing there. People with, like, no arms, no legs, no eyes, no teeth..? Rats were everywhere…a ghastly and weird city.”^143^  

From a shallow first impression that is one layer of Manila. From the gaze of the United States and the supposed First World, an encounter with Manila is an uncomfortable experience because it renders visible the effects of colonialism, capitalism, capitalism,

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and degradation in the Philippines: tall buildings, military bases, and shopping malls next to or across from a community of make-shift houses erected out of bits and pieces of plywood, thin sheets of metal, and cardboard boxes stacked on top or next to each other; the sprawling metropolis of Metro Manila integrated with the poor and squatter community; and freeways overlooking the dark over-polluted waters of the Pasig River on one side and Smokey Mountain, a giant mountain of rubbish, on the other. Unlike that in the First World where its grime and rejected population of poor and marginalized citizens and Native populations are cast off, hidden, and rendered invisible, Manila makes it visible. Manila is overcrowded because it is home to over thirteen million Filipinos. Manila suffocates because Filipinos flock there for jobs, education, and opportunities. Manila is dirty because the Philippines is poor from hundreds of years of colonial domination and exploitation. Manila has cockroaches, rats, and no sewage system because the Philippine elites who run the government care more about themselves than they do about the people that elected them and whom they represent.

What Claire Danes, imprisoned in her own colonial blindness, seems to have missed is that every place has a story and every people has a story. She judged and yet she did not know the context within which her judgment was made. Manila has a way of shocking us. It is shocking because it is uncomfortable. It is uncomfortable because it makes us remember. It summons harsh memories of violence, domination, exploitation, and poverty that we have all repressed into the back of our subconscious.

Manila is dark. It is unapologetic. It is harsh.
That night my family and I took the RCJ bus from Manila to Ilocos Norte. It was an overnight bus popular among Ilokanos because it had a faster traveling time than the daytime bus. My older sister, *Manang* Del, sat next to me and wanted to catch up.

“Ana… Nadine… Kumusta?” she asked.

“Ummmm.. okay met, Manang,” I answered.

[“So what… Nadine… How are you?” she asked.]

[“Ummmm.. I’m okay, Manang,” I answered.]

She looked at me, paused, and then smiled. “*Ay pimmintaska met. Limmukmeg ka pay. Nakalaplapsat ka ading. Napintas a ti biag idiay?*”

[“You’ve gotten so pretty. You have gotten fat. Very thick ading. Life must be good there?”]

I forced a smile back at her. I sighed. I hated it when people talked about my weight. I have always had a constant battle with the colonial standard of beauty superimposed not only on women but also on men. Whenever I was depressed or stressed out, I ate and gained weight. I knew though that she did not say it to directly insult me; however, I was not happy to have that issue brought up.

I shrugged and replied, “It’s okay.”

“Kumusta diay Hawai‘i? Agbasbasa ka diay University of Hawai‘i aya? Ana’t al-alaem? Kumusta met ti panagadal mo?”

[“How is Hawai‘i? You are going to the University of Hawai‘i right? What are you taking? How’s school?”]

I paused as I tried to figure out how to answer her.

I laughed uneasily and say, “Ummmm.. yeah. Political Science manang.”
“Ay nagmayaten. Aglalaingka a… Agserrek ka iti gobierno ngarud?”
[“Wow that’s good. Study hard okay… Are you going into politics then?”]
I shake my head and laugh again.

“Abobobra kan? Ana met ti trabahom?”
[“Are you working now? What kind of work do you do?”]

“Ah… Ag-work ak ta airport manang. Ag-check kami ti bags ken passengers…."
[Ah… I work at the airport manang. We check bags and passengers….”]

_Dammit_, I thought, _how do I say... before they board the plane in Ilokano? Why is it so hard? Where is my mother when I needed her? This is embarrassing._ “Ummm… before they board the plane,” I added hastily.

_Oh no_, I thought, _I sound like an idiot_. I was having a hard time carrying on a conversation because I could not remember how to say even the most basic words in Ilokano.

The conversation proceeded on all night as we made our way to Ilocos. I felt awkward and frustrated carrying on a conversation replying mainly in English and slightly sprinkling it with some Ilokano words. I was trying so hard by searching the deep recesses of my brain, unearthing the skill and ability to speak my mother tongue, and unearthing the Ilokano vocabulary that I have forgotten.

I just could not remember. It was no longer natural for me to speak Ilokano. I was no longer fluent. Instead what came natural was English. English was easy. English had become my primary spoken language. English had become the language of my thoughts. Furthermore, English had even become the language of my dreams.
Of course I knew why I had difficulty speaking in Ilokano. English was the language I used everyday. Since the sixth grade when I was teased for having a “Filipino accent” I began speaking mainly English. Also I did not have much exposure to Ilokano since I moved to Hawai‘i because I lived in Pauoa Valley, an area of the island that was not exactly a hub for Filipinos. Filipinos mostly lived in Kalihi or Waipahu where Filipino languages and cultures thrived and were easily accessible and encountered. I was however physically located in the fringe of the Filipino community in Hawai‘i. The Filipino kids I encountered in school were Americanized or have already assimilated. Even the few Filipino friends I had in school were undergoing their own assimilation process and we mainly spoke in English to each other.

I also experienced the same phenomena at work. There were a lot of Filipinos but the language of work was English. It was frowned upon to speak anything else. The only Ilokano I encountered was through my parents. They spoke to me in Ilokano always and never in English. However, since grade school, I have always responded back in English. Unlike me, my parents retained their Ilokano culture and continued to speak their mother tongue. They spoke English at work but once they came home they spoke in Ilokano. I, on the other hand, did not switch off from one to the other. I was consumed by English. I was consumed by America. Because of that, English became my dominant language.

Only until my return to the Philippines did I realize what I had lost. It was not so apparent in Hawai‘i because everyone spoke English or at least understood it. But in the Philippines, my family had a hard time understanding English completely and I was forced to speak Ilokano.
For the first five days of my return, I had to grapple with the handicap of not being able to speak Ilokano in complete sentences. Nevertheless, my family continued to talk to me, sometimes even supplying the words or guessing the words I was about to say as I stammered with my speech. My nieces and nephews who I grew up with and are my age accompanied me during these first few days while my mother was busy with the funeral (pumpon) rituals and preparations for her only brother, my uncle.

On the first day, we went to my sister’s house to eat breakfast and then headed down to my cousin’s house where the body of my uncle was being kept. Traditionally Ilokano specifically in the rural areas kept their dead in the house and used it as a viewing location with the exception of some city dwellers and the rich who could afford to pay for a funeral home. The house serves as a gathering place for family and neighbors to pay their respects and participate in the funeral rituals. The rituals for my uncle included lualo, prayer, and dung-aw, an Ilokano tradition of extolling the life of the deceased, were conducted every morning and night until the funeral day.

On the first day as I sat outside my cousin’s house with my nieces, Jing, Din, I.G., Lilah, and Kim during the late afternoon as more and more guests started to arrive. I was greeted and welcomed by many relatives I had not seen in almost a decade. They were delighted to see me as they fretted about how much I had grown since they last saw me. After a few hours the men and older women left to go to the kitchen to make preparations for dinner. As the sun began to set I saw several people setting up tables to play cards. Soon drinking began which usually lasted to the early morning. It was customary to have the mourners stay up all night to watch the body or else evil spirits come to take the spirit
of the dead at night. The cards and the drinking therefore are forms of amusement for the mourners so that they can keep themselves awake.

Eventually the conversations around me turned to life and current problems. Even my nieces eventually joined these talks. I sat watching them as they gossiped about people and grumbled about their present-day struggles. I sat in the middle of their conversations, listening, but not participating. I was quiet. I was invisible. I was an outsider.

_How could I participate? I knew nothing of their problems_, I thought, _I have been absent in their lives for years. Essentially I knew nothing about them._

I felt nauseous and saddened at the thought of what the separation and distance has done to the connection between my family and I. I missed years of their lives and they have missed years of mine. Our connection has been ruptured. Our childhood, our past, and our familial ties are the only things that have been keeping us together. We are now only bound by memories. They do not know my present and I no longer know theirs. I felt like a foreigner, a foreigner to my own family.

That night as I lay down in bed thinking about this feeling of estrangement, I was overwhelmed by emotions. I felt lonely because I felt different from everyone. I felt sad because things were no longer the same. I felt the tears fall down the side of my face making my pillow wet. I cried silently in the dark. I cried because I could no longer go back and I could no longer recover the past. _How can I reestablish the connection with my family again? On top of that, how do I do it when I cannot even talk to them?_

Everyday as I encountered more and more Ilokano, I could feel my Ilokano speech getting stronger. I was relearning words that I thought I had lost but in fact were
only forgotten and it took only an encounter with them to be seared into my memory once again. I began to add more and more words into my memory bank and I began to use them as I conversed with my family. I noticed on the fifth day of being in the Ilocos that I could speak in complete sentences without the addition of English words. It was an accomplishment and I vowed never to forget again.
Chapter 7

_Pakadagupan/Summary_

When I first started this project, everything was nebulous and unclear in my mind. I did not know where to begin. I did not know where to end. It was not the usual research project conducted in the same research method. It was about stories. It was about my story. I was attempting to talk about myself, something subjective, in a world that privileges objectivity and the separation of the self from the research process. I had to prove to the system, the world, and to the academe that this project is scientific and significant. At the same time I had to attempt to get out of the standard modes of doing a research project. It is really a paper that privileges essences, substances, and qualitative statements and how these statements really impact our lives.

I thought that it was going to be easy however I realized that it was not. The easiness is the presumption that it is easy to tell my story but when I began to tell my story, I could not even figure out where that “I,” which is me, is because “I” am a bundle of contradictions. I thought I knew this “I” but it turns out I did not know anything about myself. Some stories were easier to talk about than others. Some stories were easier to remember than others. I have laughed. I have cried. I have felt pain and opened up old wounds. I have also felt strength and power from looking at all that I went through. I pushed my body, my mind, my spirit, and my capabilities to the limit. I have stayed up many nights and poured my heart and soul into this work. In spite of all the struggles and difficulties I went through, I learned a lot about myself and the world that I live in that I would never have learned if I did not venture into this project. I think my eyes are more open and I am more conscious.
This work, this *Matris ti Kinaasinno*, has been an attempt to understand the difficulty of the colonized subject: the difficulty of being an Ilokano woman, the difficulty of being an Ilokano immigrant woman in Hawai‘i, and the difficulty of being an Ilokano immigrant woman in the United States at large. In this project I have attempted at coming to terms with a wounded memory. This is a project that will always be open, even to the terrors of trying to remember what we can, what we cannot, and what we refuse to remember. Remembering reopens old wounds but it can sometimes also create new wounds. In the end, the *Matris ti Kinaasinno* is itself a wellspring from which new questions can also be conceived and birthed, even as we try to respond to the old questions. Even as I write the final pages of this work, I might encounter new questions in the way that the *matris* might be open to new conceptions.

This project is also at the same time a critique of the “machine” and its various arms that work together to oppress, silence, and produce colonized subjects like me. My story-making and storytelling is a response to these hegemonic structures and institutions that are invested in my forgetting. Instead of spending my life in darkness, I chose to face the traumas head-on by remembering.

Since memories constitute a people’s histories, memories connect the past with the present and future. This means that as a people we have also inherited the traumas and injustice faced by our ancestors. By remembering I have had to face my own dismemberments and the dismemberments of those around me and before me. At the same time however we have also inherited the stories of their survival and resilience. Because of this, it is important if not necessary to assert and fight to keep our identities,
languages, and our priorities in the face of these global and domestic institutions and structures that serve to push and preserve the agendas of the hegemonies.

My hope with this work is to add to the discourse, to the diversity of voices out there. Although others are implicated as I recalled and wrote these stories, I think it is also important for everyone to continue these similar projects of taking back our histories, our voices, and our points of views. To do this would mean to take a little bit of the power back and take control of our own lives.

There is a need to reclaim who we are. The idea of reclaiming is never final. One way we can reclaim is to go back to our stories, all the stories that we are. Sometimes these could be tragic stories, traumatic stories, ugly stories, or joyful stories. These are stories of who we are as a people, as an individual, as a community, as a self, and as a collective. The stories that we are and the stories of who we are is like a puzzle. It is like a big picture that consists of each person’s story. It is difficult to see the bigger story of the collective without each individual piece. As a result, you cannot understand the bigger story without understanding your story and you cannot understand your story without the story of the collective. The self is not totally separate from the bigger idea of a collective “selves” who accounts the community, family, and society where one grows up and eventually ends up.

Reclaiming therefore is never finished. Reclaiming is a continuous exploratory act. There’s no final reclaiming because every act of reclaiming is always marked by and mediated by our ability to remember, to mediate what we remember in words and in our language, and to link all this memory and language to what really happened in the bigger dynamic of the collective social story.
For us to be healed, we must be healed entirely: body, mind, soul, and spirit. Even this healing must be assumed as impermanent because there will be new stories that will remind us of the continuing pathology of who we are as individuals and as people with the continuing dynamics of capitalism, imperialism, extension of the logic of the male at the expense of the female, etc. We will always expect a negation of the success we had and whatever claims we can have. As a result, there is a need for us to be vigilant, to be constant in our way of reclaiming, and to make sure we never forget.
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